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The Role of Stereotype Content in Facilitating Positive Mediated Intergroup Contact: An Examination of Perceptions of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Television Characters

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in Communication

by

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Publications

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Sink, A., Mastro, D., & Dragojevic, M. (2017). Competent or warm?: Applying the stereotype content model to perceptions of masculine and effeminate gay television characters. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*.

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ABSTRACT

The Role of Stereotype Content in Facilitating Positive Mediated Intergroup Contact: An Examination of Perceptions of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Television Characters

by

Alexander Sink

Can improving attitudes toward members of stigmatized groups be as simple as turning on the television? This dissertation project explores how principles of the stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske et al., 2002) can refine and ideally strengthen the study of mediated intergroup contact (Park, 2012) through a focus on character attributes and media content features. Specifically, a series of 3 studies examined how warmth and competence evaluations of television characters influence the optimal conditions and affective mediators of positive intergroup contact, as described in intergroup contact theory. This research is novel in its use of SCM as a framework to evaluate intergroup contact conditions, mediators, and outcomes. Thus, these findings advance both the SCM and intergroup contact literatures in several important ways.

This project continues a program of research that has applied principles of the stereotype content model to the study of media stereotypes with a focus on mitigating negative emotional and behavioral outcomes of media exposure (Sink & Mastro, 2016; Sink & Mastro, 2017; Sink, Mastro, & Dragojevic, 2017). The findings from these new studies

have considerable theoretical and practical implications. Specifically, these studies will (a) expand knowledge concerning the effects of exposure to media that features sexual minorities, (b) redirect attention toward the universal dimensions underlying stereotypes rather than the narrow, group-specific characterizations that are typically examined, and (c) potentially explain why mediated contact is effective in reducing prejudice for some groups and not others.

To situate this work, intergroup contact theory and the stereotype content model will be outlined to provide the theoretical foundation for these studies. Next, a comprehensive overview of the current state of social scientific research concerning sexual minorities on television will be provided. Finally, the methods and results of 3 studies will be provided before discussing the broader implications of these findings for society and the entertainment industry. Study 1 explored how warmth and competence evaluations of television characters are related to several optimal conditions of mediated intergroup contact (i.e., perceived typicality, ingroup similarity). Study 2 examined the extent to which warmth and competence character evaluations are predictive of the affective mediators of intergroup contact (i.e., intergroup anxiety, empathy, and trust). Study 3 documented the extent to which warmth and competence evaluations of a single character generalized to an outgroup as a whole, as well as the potential for characters of varying stereotype content to either improve or exacerbate pre-existing prejudice.

Chapter 1: Integrating Theories of Intergroup Contact and the Stereotype Content Model

In recent years, scholars interested in the media's role in social perception and other intergroup phenomena have gravitated toward theories of intergroup communication to situate their work (e.g, McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, 2014; Reid, Giles, & Abrams, 2004; Trepte, 2006). This dissertation utilizes insights provided by *intergroup contact theory* (Allport, 1954), which outlines the conditions under which intergroup communication can reduce prejudice, and *the stereotype content model* (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), which posits that warmth and competence constitute the universal evaluative dimensions from which we judge members of different social groups. Although other media scholars have used contact theory (e.g., Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Park, 2012) or SCM variables (e.g., Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012) in isolation in their empirical examinations of media stereotypes, this project is the first to synthesize tenants of these theories in this context. This chapter will provide comprehensive overviews of intergroup contact theory, the SCM, and their applications to media research.

Intergroup Contact Theory: Applications to Media Studies

Exposure to media portrayals of various social groups can influence intergroup perception and communication (see Mastro, 2009 for review). The impetus for much of the research in this domain has been to document how media messages impact the formation and maintenance of stereotypes. Integrated theories of media and social information processing have modeled relationships between the cognitions (i.e., stereotypes) primed by negative portrayals of minority groups and intergroup beliefs, emotions, or behavioral intentions (e.g., Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Ramasubramanian, 2011). This work has been

instrumental in documenting the direct influence of media on various cognitive processes related to discrimination. However, less attention has been paid to specific ways in which media can improve intergroup relations.

Generally, models of media stereotyping have conceptualized *prejudicial attitudes* as one of several mediating variables operating between media exposure and discriminatory voting behaviors (e.g., Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Ramasubramanian, 2011). In contrast, intergroup contact theory treats *prejudice* as a key outcome variable that is used to assesses the *quality* of an intergroup exchange. Contact scholars have worked to identify specific communicative features or conditions that are believed to either increase or decrease prejudicial attitudes. Therefore, intergroup contact theory is especially well suited to explore how specific media content features can *change* intergroup attitudes while providing metrics for assessing the presence of content features that may improve them. A growing body of research from this perspective has examined how intergroup contact with media characters can foster auspicious and prosocial outcomes (e.g., Ramasubramanian, 2013; Schiappa et al., 2005).

Work on *mediated intergroup contact* (MIC) has found that under certain conditions, exposure to social groups via the media can improve attitudes toward and beliefs about members of those groups in general (see Park, 2012). Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis is widely credited as being foundational for this impressive and socially significant body of research. The contact hypothesis postulates that face-to-face interpersonal contact between members of clashing social groups can bring about more harmonious intergroup relations. Importantly, Allport further specified that there are optimal conditions for intergroup contact that increase the likelihood of positive contact and decrease the likelihood of negative

contact. First, members of each group should be of *equal status*, meaning that both individuals engage equally in the relationship and have relatively similar qualities, backgrounds, and characteristics (e.g., education, skills, socioeconomic status). If such differences in relative prestige and rank exist, the member of the more dominant group should actively work to minimize them. In addition, both group members should share *common goals* (i.e., a superordinate goal) that can only be achieved by pooling their efforts and resources without competition (i.e., *collaboration*). Finally, the intergroup relationship should also have the *support of societal authorities and institutions* (e.g., the law), and the contact situation should involve some degree of informal, *personal interaction* to encourage the development of cross-group friendships. Such amicable relationships are known to be especially effective in improving intergroup relations (Turner et al., 2007).

The contact hypothesis has received substantial empirical support since its inception, with studies documenting the prosocial effects of positive contact across a wide variety of target groups (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities; sexual minorities; religious minorities; linguistic groups), intergroup situations, and cultural contexts. A meta-analysis of 515 studies by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) provides strong support for the positive benefits of the contact hypothesis. Across these studies, direct face-to-face communication was found to significantly reduced prejudice. Stated simply, there is a significant negative correlation between direct contact with an outgroup member and prejudice toward members of that group.

Underlying Cognitive and Affective Mechanisms of Intergroup Contact. Scholars have explored numerous underlying psychological processes to help explain the cognitive mechanisms associated with intergroup contact in order to better understand *why*

intergroup contact is effective in reducing prejudice. Allport (1954) originally argued that these outcomes were a result of increased *learning* about outgroups, such that newly acquired knowledge directly leads to decreased prejudice. However, subsequent studies have only found weak, limited support for this notion (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Instead, scholars have gravitated to the notion that intergroup contact impacts affective reactions to outgroup members that in turn have an effect on prejudicial beliefs. In other words, contact reduces prejudice more through affective rather than cognitive mechanisms (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Specifically, contact is hypothesized to reduce the *fear* and *anxiety* that is typically associated with outgroup contact, which in turn reduces individuals' negative reactions toward members of that group (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Other scholars have argued that increased feelings of *trust* also play an important role in these processes (e.g., Visintin, Voci, Pagotto, & Hewstone, 2016). Finally, intergroup contact is believed to increase individuals' ability to *empathize* with the struggles of outgroup members via increased perspective-taking (Stephan & Finlay, 1999). In a meta-analysis of the contact literature, the mediating roles of anxiety, empathy, and trust in reducing prejudice were substantiated with strong empirical support (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Stated simply, intergroup contact is negatively related to anxiety and positively related to feelings of trust and empathy held toward outgroup members.

Indirect Contact Strategies. Though the positive effects of optimal contact experiences are clear and well supported empirically, there are some limitations to this strategy. In many intergroup contexts, face-to-face contact is all but impossible to achieve (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005). As Stephan and Stephan (2000) note, it can be quite difficult to bring people of diverse backgrounds together when groups live, work, and

socialize in segregated settings. Even where there are ample opportunities for this kind of contact, such as in diverse, populous urban regions, individuals may feel threatened by the mere presence of unfamiliar outgroup members and are subsequently stymied by the fear associated with anticipated contact. Indeed, people tend to interact with others they perceive as being similar to themselves, often based on shared qualities such as race, age, and gender (Graham & Cohen, 1997). In these cases, it is rare for Allport's optimal contact conditions to be met (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005). In response to these concerns, scholars have explored how less direct strategies may help to alleviate intergroup tensions.

Hewstone and Swart (2011) coined *indirect contact* as an umbrella term to describe other forms of contact that are not characterized by face-to-face communication between members of different social groups. With their extended contact hypothesis, Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, and Ropp (1997) proposed two mechanisms beyond direct contact that could potentially improve intergroup relations. These include strategies that can be classified as *extended* or *vicarious* contact. Although an in-depth discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of indirect contact is beyond the scope of this chapter, Vezzali and colleagues (2014, p. 317-320) provide a thorough overview of how tenants of balance theory (Heider, 1958), vicarious dissonance theory (Cooper & Hogg, 2007), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), and vicarious self-perception theory (Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007) can be used to understand the psychological processes at work. In short, individuals are motivated to reduce the cognitive discomfort between outgroup fear and the knowledge of (or exposure to) an ingroup member's amicable relations with an outgroup member by improving their attitudes and modeling positive behavior.

Indirect contact strategies have been classified into three overarching categories: *extended contact* (i.e., awareness that at least one ingroup member has close, direct contact with a social outgroup member; Vezzali et al., 2014), *imagined contact* (i.e., actively visualizing direct contact with a social outgroup member; Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, 2007), and *vicarious contact* (i.e., the direct observation of an intergroup interaction). Though empirical support has been found for all of these indirect contact strategies, the remainder of this section will focus on the vicarious contact literature given its applicability to media studies.

Vicarious Contact. Vicarious contact refers to "the direct observation of an interaction between ingroup and outgroup members, where individuals have the opportunity to acquire new responses, or modify the existing ones" (Vezzali et al., 2014, p. 317). Vicarious contact is often operationalized in laboratory settings by allowing participants to view confederates of different groups interacting through a one-way mirror (e.g., Wright et al., 1997), or by exposing subjects to video clips of cross-group interactions (e.g., Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011). As such, vicarious contact seems particularly relevant to researchers interested in portrayals of various social groups in the media, and the effects of exposure to such characterizations on audience members. Scholars in this domain have described this process as both *parasocial contact* (see Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005 for review) and *mediated intergroup contact* (see Park, 2012 for review). For vicarious contact to occur in naturalistic settings, it is assumed that the media can and will offer content in which there are auspicious portrayals of diverse social groups engaging in harmonious intergroup relations. As Park (2012) explains, mediated intergroup contact can occur either (a) directly between an audience member and an outgroup character, or (b) indirectly via the

audiences' identification with ingroup characters who engage in friendly interactions with outgroup characters. Much like Allport's contact hypothesis, there are optimal conditions for mediated intergroup contact that influence the effectiveness of prejudice reduction. Minority group characters should be of relatively equal status to members of more dominant groups, hold shared goals, interact in cooperative contexts, have high acquaintance potential (i.e., viewers feel a sense *similarity* and kinship to the character), and be perceived as *typical* of their group (Park, 2012). Stated simply, positive portrayals of minority group members are most effective in promoting positive mediated intergroup contact.

Numerous experimental (e.g., Bogatz & Ball, 1971; Joyce & Harwood, 2014; Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005; Tal-Or & Tsfati, 2016) and correlational studies (e.g., Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006; Sink & Mastro, 2017) have demonstrated the potential for media messages (particularly television programs) featuring positive portrayals of diverse minority group members and cooperative intergroup relations to facilitate positive intergroup contact. As with direct contact, prejudice reduction occurs through interrelated cognitive (e.g., reduced desire for social distance, stereotype maintenance, decreased infrahumanization) and affective routes (e.g., reduced anxiety, increased empathy and trust). Importantly, meta-analytic work by McIntyre, Paolini, and Hewstone (2016) has established that the positive contact effects tend to generalize to broader outgroup judgments, especially when participants are exposed to several moderately atypical characterizations of a group. In other words, the positive effects of vicarious contact are not limited to the specific characters of interest, but instead tend to generalize to the outgroup as a whole.

However, the effectiveness of vicarious contact strategies is not consistent for members of all social group. As Harwood and Joyce (2012) note, the role of specific group memberships in these contact processes remains unclear and understudied. Though there are generally positive effects associated with indirect contact strategies, a meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) revealed that the effects are stronger for some groups (e.g., homosexuals) and weaker for others (e.g., elderly individuals). Other scholars have found that genre-based differences exist when examining mediated contact processes (e.g., Vistin, Voci, Pagotto, & Hewstone, 2016).

Summary. Although work on mediated intergroup contact has offered important evidence concerning the role of the media in improving intergroup relations, specific content and character features that facilitate positive contact are often ignored, unmeasured, and discussed only in terms of theoretical implications. Indeed, scholars have argued the influence of group memberships (i.e., group-specific features) on the effectiveness of intergroup contact remains unclear and understudied (Harwood & Joyce, 2012). Given that the stereotype content model has been used to evaluate, differentiate, and compare media characterizations of diverse minority groups (Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012; Sink & Mastro, 2016; Sink et al., 2017), the principles provided by the theory may prove useful in deepening our understanding the content features associated with positive mediated intergroup contact. In the next section, the stereotype content model will be outlined (with particular emphasis on its application to mediated contact) before a discussion of the potential benefits of applying SCM to intergroup contact research.

The Stereotype Content Model: Applications to Media Studies

In recent years, researchers have undertaken substantive efforts to understand the cognitive aspects of stereotypes, which have resulted in considerable advances in our understanding the stereotyping process (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Hamilton, 2015; Hamilton & Trolier, 1986; Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994). However, this increased attention on cognition has resulted in somewhat less focus being placed on the universalities in the structural features of stereotypes, and the impact of these features on affective and behavioral outcomes. In contrast, the stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske et al., 2002; see Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007 for review) addresses the systematic ways that groups' characteristics converge, and the implications of stereotype content on intergroup perceptions and behaviors. Whereas stereotypes were originally conceived in social psychology as distinct sets of characterizations (negative, positive, and/or ambivalent) associated with different groups and their members, the SCM posits that stereotypes are organized along the two universal evaluative dimensions of *warmth* (i.e., warm, kind, friendly) and *competence* (i.e., competent, intelligent, skilled). Perceptions of warmth and competence influence how individuals view social groups, and these cognitions are believed to guide both emotional and behavioral responses toward members of these groups (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007).

SCM posits that stereotypes are formed on the basis of how groups relate to one another along warmth and competence dimensions. Specifically, warmth attributions are based on perceptions of intergroup competition over limited resources (e.g., job promotion, public services, welfare), such that high warmth is attributed to noncompetitive social groups and low warmth is associated with competitive groups. Conversely, competence

judgments are based on perceptions a of a group's relative status, such that high competence is attributed to dominant groups and low competence is assigned to subordinate groups. Group judgments along these trait dimensions can result in favorable, unfavorable, ambivalent, and neutral evaluations. As such, groups converge into 4 distinct clusters across the warmth and competence domain (see Fiske et al., 2002): high warmth/low competence (HW-HC; e.g., the elderly, housewives); low warmth/high competence (LW-HC; e.g., Asians, Jews), low warmth/low competence (LW-LC; e.g., the homeless, welfare recipients); and high warmth/high competence (HW-HC; e.g., ingroup members, close allies).

The BIAS Map. Although research has demonstrated that a group's placement within these four quadrants may change over time and across cultures (Cuddy et al., 2009), understanding such positioning is consequential as each quadrant elicits unique affective responses that are associated with distinct behavioral outcomes: active facilitation (e.g., helping behaviors), active harm (e.g., attacking), passive facilitation (e.g., association); and passive harm (e.g., excluding; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). In essence, SCM research operates under a tripartite model of intergroup attitudes and behaviors, which identifies three psychological components of bias: cognitions (stereotypes), affect (emotional prejudices), and behavior (discrimination). These components function in synchrony with one another, such that cognitive appraisals of an outgroup's stereotype content (i.e., warmth and competence) prompt specific patterns of emotions. Groups seen as HW-HC (such as one's own ingroup) are admired whereas groups that are disliked (LW-LC), such as the poor, are viewed with contempt. Groups seen as HW-LC (e.g., the elderly) generate pity, while LW-HC groups (e.g., career women) elicit envy. These affective reactions then trigger discrete

behavioral responses that are conceptualized as coping mechanisms for the potential threat that some outgroups may pose. With the BIAS (Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes) map, Cuddy et al. (2008) extend the SCM by predicting that warmth stereotypes elicit active facilitation and prevent active harm, whereas competence stereotypes prompt passive facilitation and prevent passive harm. Thus, warmth governs the nature of active behaviors (i.e., facilitative or harmful) and competence determines the nature of passive behaviors.

To illustrate, social groups that are perceived as warm and non-competitive (HW-LC; e.g., the elderly) evoke paternalistic emotions, such that members of those groups are liked but simultaneously disrespected and pitied. Groups that are perceived as non-threatening and high-status (HW-HC; i.e., ingroup members and close allies) elicit feelings of pride and admiration, whereas low-status and threatening groups (LW-LC; e.g., welfare recipients) are met with contemptuous feelings of pity and disgust. Finally, high-status and competitive outgroups (LW-HC; e.g., Asians) are met with envious admiration and resentment. In sum, distinct types of discriminatory judgments and behaviors stem from each warmth/competence combination, and explicit predictions can be made about the affective and behavioral responses to an outgroup member based on these combinations. The predictions offered by SCM and BIAS map have received impressive empirical support across diverse samples (see Fiske et al., 2007 for review).

Media and Stereotyping. Though researchers have only recently begun to apply SCM principles to the study of media portrayals (e.g., Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012; Sink, Mastro, & Dragojevic, 2017), the study of group-specific stereotypes and the role of the media in shaping them has garnered considerable academic attention for the past several

decades. Although this body of research has generally established that media images can impact our preexisting views of social groups and even influence the creation of new stereotypes (Mastro, 2009), this work has important limitations. Specifically, many of the theories scholars have used to examine these processes (e.g., cultivation theory, social identity theory, priming theory) do not allow for broad comparisons between characters of different social groups. Instead, researchers have generally focused on the media's role in priming or cultivating group-specific stereotypes (e.g., Latinos as criminals; women as sexual objects). By refocusing scholarly attention on the universal dimensions of stereotype content (i.e., warmth and competence), the study of media stereotypes will progress in several ways. Namely, the SCM allows media scholars to make potentially limitless comparisons between characterizations of diverse social groups based on the same underlying dimensions. In addition, the theory provides insights concerning both the likely affective and behavioral outcomes of media exposure to characterizations of minority group members.

The Role of Media Content in the Formation and Maintenance of Group-Specific Stereotypes. A great deal of research has focused on the antisocial outcomes associated with stereotypes, emerging from both natural and mediated environments (Mackie et al., 1996). Cognitive scholars have generally concluded that stereotypes exist to reduce cognitive stressors related information processing, to reduce uncertainty, and to make sense of the complex world that surrounds them (Srull & Wyer, 1979). The stereotype formation process is often subconscious, and this categorization process allows humans to generalize knowledge across category/group members. This aids in the perception of a novel stimulus (e.g., person, object) when specific information is lacking (Mackie et al., 1996). When

processing social information, group differentiation often leads to stereotyping (Operario & Fiske, 2003). Stereotypes, then, can be understood as beliefs about the attributes that characterize a group of people (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981), whereas stereotyping is the cognitive categorization process that results in stereotypes. These stereotypes contain information about group qualities such as social roles, within-group homogeneity, and cultural norms (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick & Esses, 2010).

Researchers have explored how mass media messages can influence the cognitive processes associated with stereotyping. Initially, media scholars situated their work through "traditional" theories of media effects, including cultivation theory (e.g., Gerbner et al., 2002), social cognitive theory (e.g., Dill & Thill, 2007), and priming theory (e.g, Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996). However, despite the inherently intergroup nature of stereotyping, theories of intergroup communication have only been introduced to the study of media stereotypes relatively recently (see Mastro, 2009). Both social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and social categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) have been used to explain how stereotyping often results in inaccurate, unfavorable, and even prejudicial responses to outgroup members. Specifically, to achieve positive social identity, individuals often make downward social comparisons to outgroup members following the creation of unfavorable stereotypes associated with members of these groups (i.e., ingroup favoritism). Thus, these theories offer useful frameworks for exploring how media exposure may contribute to stereotyping and discrimination, though these studies are generally limited to examinations of exposure effects to stereotypical portrayals of a single minority group (e.g., Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Kopacz, 2008) to comparisons of the influence of characterizations a single minority group (e.g., Latinos) to

the relevant majority group (e.g., Whites; Mastro, 2003). In general, this work has found that by promoting biased intergroup comparisons that ultimately serve the esteem needs of dominant group members, the media is an important contributor to group-specific stereotyping and subsequent prejudicial outcomes (Mastro, 2009).

Media exposure may contribute to the *formation* of stereotypes by influencing what viewers believe are the prototypical features associated with specific social groups. Research has demonstrated that people are inherently skilled at unconsciously detecting covariation between elements in a certain context (e.g. a media character's group membership and role), so even just minimal exposure to a given set of covarying elements may be sufficient to initiate a cognitive link in long term memory, thereby promoting stereotype formation (Lewicki, 1986; Hill, Lewicki, Czyzewska, & Schuller, 1990). As noted by Dragojevic et al. (2016), the media can help shape what viewers come to define as prototypical traits held by members of various social groups, as well as provide viewers with concrete exemplars in the form of media characters. This is especially common for viewers with limited contact with members of the outgroup in their everyday lives (Hawkins & Pingree, 1990). Media use may also influence the *maintenance* of stereotypes by increasing their accessibility in long-term memory (Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Ortiz, 2007). Frequent exposure to media stereotypes can make them chronically accessible (i.e., a priming effect; see Roskos-Ewoldsen & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009 for review). As stereotypes are known to bias subsequent information processing in ways that promote their own survival (von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995), this repeated exposure might even promote their use in heavy media consumers.

Taken together, the findings in the domain of the cultivation of media stereotypes support the notion that exposure to mass media messages can: (a) influence views about diverse groups, in a manner consistent with the overarching media portrayals of these groups and (b) promote unfavorable intergroup attitudes, such as prejudice, depending on the nature of the representation. However, when considering this body of work, it appears that researchers have placed emphasis on specific stereotypes associated with each group (e.g., Blacks are criminals; Latinos are lazy) as opposed to more general measures of stereotype content that can be applied to multiple social groups. Although research has demonstrated that there are negative outcomes associated with presenting women as sex objects and racial/ethnic minorities as criminals, this group-specific stereotype approach fails to provide insights as to the relative severity of media misrepresentation. For a more holistic understanding of the intergroup context provided by mass media, it is important to be able to comparatively evaluate the quality of media representations of different groups in relation to each other.

In addition, variations may exist in the frequency and/or nature of a particular group's characterization in the media. In these instances, the group-specific stereotype approach may prove ineffective in identifying what, if any, systematic outcomes are likely to occur following exposure to such portrayals. This may help explain why media effects may not always be found when examining socialization-based outcomes for groups whose portrayals vary widely, such as Blacks (e.g., Jeffres, Atkin, & Neuendorf, 2001), or who are grossly underrepresented, such as Native Americans (e.g., Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht, 1997). So, while we know a great deal about the effects of exposure to negative/stereotypical representations of various social groups, we know considerably less about the implications

of more complex characterizations. Here, integrating insights from the stereotype content model is particularly valuable.

Applications of SCM in Research on Media Stereotypes. Media scholars have been slow to adopt the principles of SCM to situate their studies of media stereotypes. Applying SCM tenants to the study of media portrayals is an important direction for advancing this body of research. The SCM provides several theoretical affordances that can uniquely contribute to the study of characterizations of marginalized groups and provide insights as to how and why media portrayals may ultimately influence intergroup emotions and behaviors (Sink et al., 2017). First, given that a society's cultural systems are defined in no small part by cultural institutions such as mass media, its messages serve to define – at least to some extent – perceptions about a group's relative status and competence (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2015; Cuddy et al., 2009).

Second, the presence and frequency of these representations legitimizes and validates such status and competency perceptions. Third, by normalizing these views, the known prejudicial and discriminatory responses associated with these perceptions become systematized as well as more easily identified/predicted (and possibly even mitigated). In other words, understanding a group's mediated positioning in terms of warmth and competence provides insights into the probable emotional reactions and behavioral responses to members of that group, both within and beyond the media context. Thus, the analysis of media characters based on warmth and competence variables provides insight as to the likely outcomes of exposure to these characterizations. Additionally, the theory provides criteria (i.e., warmth and competence evaluations) that allow for comparisons

across depictions of diverse groups, which can broaden the scope of media stereotyping research past group-specific examinations.

The few scholars that have applied SCM principles to media studies have found mixed support for the theory's propositions. In a content analysis of gender portrayals on primetime television, Sink and Mastro (2016) found that women across 89 popular programs were presented as significantly warmer (but not less competent) than their male counterparts. Sanders and Ramasubramanian (2012) conducted a survey that asked African American participants to evaluate popular fictional media characters based on warmth and competence variables. Results indicated that participants evaluated ingroup characters most favorably (i.e., high both warmth in competence), yet these warmth and competence perceptions were not reliably associated with their predicted emotional responses. In a similar vein, Sink et al. (2017) found that warmth and competence variables significantly differentiated perceptions of effeminate (i.e., stereotypical) and masculine (i.e, non-stereotypical) characterizations of gay men from a television sitcom. In an experimental examination of exposure to immigration news stories, Atwell Seate and Mastro (2017) found that feelings contempt toward threatening portrayals of undocumented immigrants were associated with harming behavioral tendencies toward members of that group. Though this study did not directly measure perceptions of stereotype content, these findings can be considered support for predictions offered by the BIAS map, as undocumented immigrants are traditionally stereotyped as deficient in both warmth and competence (and should therefore evoke contempt and harming behaviors).

When taken together, this work offers evidence that SCM concepts have important applications to content analytic, experimental, and survey studies of media stereotypes.

Specifically, warmth and competence variables are useful in measuring perceptions of media characters, as they offer standardized metrics for evaluating and comparing the quality of characterizations of various social groups (Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012; Sink & Mastro, 2016; Sink et al., 2017). In addition, preliminary evidence exists that exposure to stereotypical media content can produce the predicted emotional and behavioral outcomes posited by the BIAS map (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2017). However, more work is needed to replicate findings that more directly measure warmth and competence variables. Of course, this small body of work is not without limitations. Notably, these studies have failed to fully test the theoretical model (i.e., measuring stereotype content, affect, *and* behavior), and they have not yet addressed how warmth and competence variables may be used to understand *positive* media effects (i.e., prejudice reduction).

Using Stereotype Content to Understand Mediated Intergroup Contact

As previously outlined, work on mediated intergroup contact has offered important evidence concerning the potential for mass media to improve intergroup relations. However, specific content and character features that facilitate positive contact are often overlooked , unmeasured, or discussed only in terms of theoretical implications (Harwood & Joyce, 2012). Given the utility of the stereotype content model in understanding televised depictions of minority groups (e.g., Sanders & Ramasubramanian, 2012), the principles provided by the theory may prove useful in deepening our understanding the content features associated with positive mediated intergroup contact. The following section presents the rationale for the 3 studies of this dissertation project. Specifically, warmth and competence variables will be presented as tools for researchers to evaluate the optimal

conditions of intergroup contact, the affective mediators of intergroup contact, and as predictors of the valence of mediated intergroup contact.

Study 1: Warmth, Competence, and the Optimal Conditions of Intergroup Contact

Stereotype content variables may assist in evaluating the cognitive moderators or optimal conditions of positive contact. Adapting Allport's optimal direct contact conditions, Park (2012) argues that mediated intergroup contact is best facilitated when a viewer perceives an outgroup character as (a) being of equal status, (b) having shared goals and values, (c) appearing cooperative, (d) having high acquaintance potential (i.e., similarity), and (e) being representative or typical of his or her group. SCM can help to evaluate some of these essential conditions by providing information pertaining to the extent to which a media character is perceived as being prototypical, as well as the degree to which a character is perceived as being similar to a viewer's ingroup (i.e., having comparable status, values, and high acquaintance potential). In study 1, extensive pilot testing was undertaken to identify characterizations of gay men, lesbian women, and transgender individuals from media content that vary in terms of stereotype content (i.e., warmth and competence). In addition, data was collected concerning the cognitive moderators of positive intergroup contact (i.e., outgroup typicality and ingroup similarity). The results of this preliminary study offer evidence concerning the effectiveness of warmth and competence character attributes in predicting the optimal conditions of intergroup contact.

Study 2: Warmth, Competence, and the Affective Mediators of Intergroup Contact

As previously discussed, intergroup contact reduces prejudice through both affective and cognitive mechanisms, though meta-analytic work has shown that emotions may have a stronger influence on these contact processes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). Specifically, the

emotions of anxiety, trust, and empathy have been identified as key mediators in producing positive contact and reducing prejudice held toward outgroup members (Park, 2012). Recall that SCM argues that different combinations of warmth and competence elicit specific affective reactions (i.e., pity, contempt, admiration envy), which in turn are related to behavioral tendencies (i.e., active/passive harm and facilitation). However, researchers have not yet explored if and how warmth and competence impacts the specific emotions associated with positive intergroup contact. In study 2, warmth and competence character attributions were used as predictors of the intergroup emotions known to facilitate positive intergroup contact. Results demonstrated the utility of using stereotype content variables in estimating these consequential intergroup emotions.

Study 3: Warmth, Competence, and Positive Mediated Intergroup Contact

After establishing how warmth and competence are related to the optimal conditions and affective mediators of intergroup contact in studies 1 and 2, it will be possible to explore if and how exposure to characterizations of varying stereotype content either promotes or prohibits positive intergroup contact. Again, meta-analytic work has established that positive contact effects tend to generalize to broader outgroup judgments (McIntyre, Paolini, & Hewstone, 2016). Importantly, though, the role of specific group memberships in these contact processes remains unclear and understudied (Harwood & Joyce, 2012). Stereotype content (i.e., warmth and competence evaluations) may help explain these differences as they are predicted to influence both the affective and cognitive mediators of positive contact.

Study 3, a longitudinal experiment, presented subjects with clips of sexual minority characters that were established as in study 1 as being either stereotype confirming or disconfirming in terms of warmth and competence variables. These stereotype content

measures are again used to predict the valence of mediated intergroup contact, as measured by change in prejudicial attitudes and beliefs felt toward the minority groups of interest. The results of this study further demonstrate the utility of SCM in understanding the processes of intergroup contact.

Chapter 2: Stereotype Content and Mediated Contact with Sexual Minorities

The relationships between stereotype content and mediated intergroup contact variables are tested in these studies with regard to media characterizations of gay men, lesbian women, and transgender women. As this next chapter will discuss in detail, gay men, lesbians, and transgender individuals are of theoretical interest when considering SCM and the proposed relationships between warmth, competence, and intergroup contact variables. Past work in this domain has found that these groups array into distinct quadrants across the model. Thus, one would expect that exposure toward stereotypical portrayals of these groups could prompt distinct emotional and behavioral outcomes, as posited by SCM and the BIAS map. This chapter will outline the current state of social scientific research that has explored media portrayals of sexual minorities. To conclude, work that has examined these specific groups from intergroup contact and SCM perspectives will be discussed.

Portrayals of Sexual Minorities in Mass Media

When considering the breadth of important and impactful work on racial/ethnic stereotypes in social psychology and media studies, our knowledge of stereotypes of the LGBTQ+ community (and the media's role in shaping them) is limited. This gap in the literature is troubling, especially when considering that sexual minorities have consistently

remained targets of widespread prejudice in the United States. Sexual minorities are frequently met with behaviors ranging from verbal abuse, physical attacks, and discriminatory public policy decisions (Herek, 2000; SPLC, 2016a; 2016b). Additionally, gay, lesbian and bisexual adults are more likely to experience criminal victimization or hate crimes than heterosexuals (Herek, 2009), and 63.5% of non-heterosexual students has felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen & Palmer, 2011). Though there were considerable legislative victories for LGBT individuals under the Obama administration (e.g., the dissolution of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy in the military; the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling on the Defense of Marriage Act), full equal rights and protections remain elusive as some states continue to pass legislation legalizing discrimination against LGBT citizens (e.g., North Carolina's controversial passing of HB2 in 2016).

Alarmingly, reports of hate crime targeting the LGBT community have sharply increased following the election of Donald Trump in 2016 (SPLC, 2016a; 2016b). This spike in crimes targeting sexual minorities and numerous other marginalized groups was so pronounced that former U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch requested the Justice Department to conduct a full investigation in late 2016 (Lynch, 2016). However, attitudes towards LGBT individuals seem to be improving in general, especially among younger generations (Hicks & Lee, 2006), and Americans now overwhelmingly support basic civil liberties and freedom of expression for gays and lesbians (Smith, 2011).

With this information in mind, it appears that attitudes towards sexual minorities in the U.S. are complex. Given that media messages have considerable potential to impact viewers' perceptions of social groups (see Mastro, 2009 for review), this chapter will discuss

the current state of social scientific research that has analyzed portrayals of gay men, lesbian women, bisexuals, and transgender individuals in mass media content. The few empirical studies that have examined the effects of exposure to these portrayals on audience members will also be reviewed.

Sexual Minorities in American Media

In recent years, programs such as ABC's *The Real O'Neals* (2016-2017), FOX's *Glee* (2009-15), NBC's *The New Normal* (2012-13), HBO's *Looking* (2014-15), Netflix's *Orange is the New Black* (2013-present), and Amazon's *Transparent* (2014-present) have received considerable attention from media critics and scholars alike. These programs have been both criticized and praised for featuring storylines involving multi-ethnic LGBT characters, interracial relationships, gender identity struggles, same-sex marriage and adoption, explicit homosexual sex scenes, and the coming out process. Even specialized cable networks have emerged that specifically curate content for LGBT audiences, including LogoTV that almost exclusively airs content developed for LGBT viewers (e.g., *Finding Prince Charming*; *RuPaul's Drag Race*). Unfortunately, our knowledge of the content of these programs and characters featured within them remains troublingly limited. Before exploring exposure effects, it is important to consider both the *quantity* and *quality* of these characterizations.

Quantity of LGBT Media Portrayals. Media scholars have long argued that a group's sheer presence in the media is an important indicator of its relative value and worth in society (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Thus, it is important to examine the decades of content analytic work that has quantified the number of LGBT characters in the media. Academic content analyses of LGBT individuals date back to the cultivation studies of Gerbner and his

colleagues throughout the late seventies and eighties. Though sexual orientation was never the primary focus of these studies, some data exists that documents gay and lesbian portrayals during this time. Gross (1984) concluded that gay men and women were mostly absent in the early days of major television network programming. Work examining subsequent decades shows that portrayals of gay men and women were scarce in the early nineties (Steiner, Fejes, & Petrich, 1993; Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992), and that gay men and women were being dramatically underrepresented when comparing the TV population to available estimates in the actual U.S. population (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). However, by the end of the 1990s, the number of gay characters on television had significantly increased from previous decades (Walters, 2001). ABC's *Ellen* (1995-98) and NBC's *Will and Grace* (1998-2006), both major network sitcoms starring gay characters, are often credited for inspiring a proliferation of LGBT characters on television in the following years.

Since the late nineties, GLAAD (formerly the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), a non-governmental U.S. media monitoring organization, has tracked the number of LGBT characters on television in their annual *Where We Are on TV* report (GLAAD, 2007-17). Though the contents of these reports are not peer reviewed or published in academic journals, they offer the most comprehensive longitudinal estimates of LGBT characters across numerous television platforms and programs. When taken together, these reports indicate that the LGBT community has gained modest prominence on major network, cable, and streaming services. Cable networks and streaming services, often praised for providing more innovative and cutting edge content, appear to more frequently feature regular LGBT characters than the major broadcast networks.

However, not all sexual minorities are equally presented across these platforms. Gay men dominate broadcast and cable programming, and while the presence of lesbian and bisexual is more modest by comparison, they have been consistently featured in the media landscape. However, some groups (e.g., bisexual men, transgender men) face the risk of symbolic annihilation (Gross, 1991) through their omission is most media content. By continuing to exclude bisexual men and transgender individuals from the cultural landscape of television, mass media send a clear message that some sexual minorities have more of a legitimate place in society than others. A group's sheer presence in the media is important because it is an indicator of the level of public support for that group in society and, thus, its *vitality*, or strength (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). Thus, the media may be functioning to reinforce heterosexist social power structures by omitting reference to disenfranchised groups such a bisexuals or transgender individuals. Importantly, these issues are not unique to television content. In a recent analysis of popular movies, television shows, and digital series, Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper (2016) found that only 2% (n = 224) of the characters in their sample (n = 414) were identifiable as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The majority of these portrayals were both White (78.9%) and male (72.1%), indicating that the media depictions of sexual minorities are relatively homogenous with regard to race/ethnicity and gender.

Quality of LGBT Media Portrayals. Although all indicators suggest that *some* sexual minorities have gained prominence in mass media offerings, we know very little about the nature (i.e., quality) of these portrayals. Even in the most recent analyses of LGBT characters in the media, the emphasis is centered on the rate of representation, rather than the manner in which these characters are depicted (GLAAD, 2016; Smith, Choueiti, & Pieper, 2016). Although measuring the quantity of depictions of the LGBT community

allows us to follow how LGBT people are evolving in the media landscape, understanding the nature of these characterizations may be even more consequential (Bond, Hefner, & Drogos, 2009; Evans, 2007). This gap in our knowledge is troubling, as extant research reveals that media use can be a powerful socializing force that shapes viewers' social and cultural constructions, including stereotypes (Gerbner et al., 2002; Mastro, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Signorielli & Morgan, 1990; Shrum, 1995).

Sexual Behavior. When latent content features associated with sexual minorities are addressed in social scientific research, the focus is primarily on depictions of sexual behaviors. Much of this research has revealed that sexual minority characters rarely engage in explicit sexual behaviors on screen. In an analysis of 4 popular network programs known to feature LGBT characters, Evans (2007) concluded that displays of affection between homosexual characters were rare, despite the abundance of heterosexual sexual content on these shows. Similarly, Fisher et al. (2007) content analyzed programming between 2001 and 2003 (n = 2,706) and found non-heterosexual sexual content was present (though infrequent) in just 15% of these programs. Films, variety/comedy shows, and programs on premium cable networks most often contained same-sex sexual content. These findings have led some to argue that the media sanitizes LGBT sexuality, with some scholars going so far as to suggest that these programs present sexual minorities as asexual (Evans, 2007; Fisher et al., 2007).

Stereotypicality. Whereas some scholars and social critics contend that portrayals of the LGBT community perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes (e.g., Appleton, 2015; Evans, 2007; Gross, 1984; Raley & Lucas, 2006; Walters, 2001), little empirical work has examined what stereotypicality actually means in the context of media portrayals of sexual

minorities (cf. Sink, Mastro, & Dragojevic, 2017). This differs from extant research that has examined racial/ethnic stereotypes in the media. This highly consequential work has rigorously quantified patterns of characterizations and stereotypes, with particular emphasis on portrayals of Blacks (e.g., Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Linz, 2000) and Latinos (e.g., Dixon & Linz, 2000; Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005; Mastro & Sink, 2016).

The few studies that have focused on explicit stereotypes of sexual minorities reveal that these biases stem from perceptions that gay men and women violate traditional sex and gender roles in a society where heterosexuality dominates cultural and societal institutions (see Herek, 1995 for review). To illustrate, researchers have found that effeminate gay men are often judged negatively, whereas 'straight-acting' or hyper-masculine gay men are evaluated more favorably for conforming to and, in some cases, even "mastering" heteronormative notions of masculinity (e.g., Madon, 1997; Page & Yee, 1985; Salvati, Ioverno, Giacomatonio, & Baiocco, 2016). In contrast, lesbians are stereotyped as having a "masculine aura" (Eliason, Donelan, & Randall, 1992, p. 131), and are most positively regarded when described as feminine looking (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997). Transgender women (i.e., male-to-female transgender individuals) are prescribed feminine gender roles, whereas transgender men (i.e., female-to-male transgender individuals) possess both feminine and masculine personality traits (Gazzola & Morrison, 2014).

Though this work has been instrumental in helping us understand potential roots of heterosexism and prejudice, it is rare for scholars to explicate stereotypicality in this context beyond notions of gender non-conformity (e.g., Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006; Glick et al., 2007). The few studies that have more directly "labeled" stereotypes have found that gay men and women are stereotyped as having mental disorders or as hypersexual deviants (e.g.,

Gilman, 1985; Szasz, 1970). Bisexual men are more negatively evaluated than bisexual women (Eliason, 2000), and common myths concerning bisexuals involve sexual deviancy (e.g., bisexuals have more sexual partners than heterosexuals and gays/lesbians), and identity issues (e.g., bisexuals are really gays/lesbians who are afraid to fully admit that they are gay). Transgender individuals are seen as abnormal, rejected by society, and mentally ill (Gazzola & Morrison, 2014). However, the extent to which these stereotypes are present in or stem from media content is unclear.

In sum, while some have argued that exposure to stereotypical portrayals of sexual minorities may have deleterious effects, much more work is needed to explicitly define stereotypicality with regard to members of these diverse groups, as well as to quantify the presence of these stereotypes across the media landscape.

Media Effects Research Related to Sexual Minorities

Given that media images can be potent, influential contributors to perceptions of social groups and even impact subsequent intergroup dynamics (Mastro, 2009), a small but growing number of studies have sought to explore the potential effects of exposure to sexual minorities in the media on both LGBT and non-LGBT audience members. For heterosexual audiences, exposure to characterizations of the LGBT community has been associated with modest prosocial outcomes, such as improved attitudes and increased social acceptance (e.g., Jang & Lee, 2014; Bond & Compton, 2014). However, this work has been criticized as largely being atheoretical, with much of the data being drawn from focus group interviews and survey methods (see Bond, 2016). To truly advance this body of work, researchers should strive to design studies that directly draw from theories of media and intergroup communication. Although the bulk of this work advocates for the inclusion more diverse

and auspicious characterizations of the LGBT community in greater numbers across the media landscape, there are still no clear answers concerning how to enhance prosocial outcomes and minimize potentially negative effects related to exposure to these characters. Thus, it is crucial for scholars to begin shaping cohesive research programs in this domain around specific theoretical approaches.

Applying Intergroup Contact Theory and the Stereotype Content Model to Media Portrayals of Sexual Minorities

For researchers interested in heterosexual audiences' responses to LGBT characters, mediated intergroup contact and the stereotype content model are particularly attractive theoretical frameworks. Mediated intergroup contact theory provides explanatory mechanisms for why exposure to characterizations of can impact attitudes and beliefs concerning sexual minorities. In contrast, SCM variables can help to evaluate the *quality* of media portrayals of sexual minorities. Thus, integrating these theoretical perspectives may provide new insights as to how the media may improve relations between LGBT and non-LGBT individuals.

Mediated Contact with Sexual Minorities

Some researchers have used mediated intergroup contact to explore how exposure to LGBT characters in entertainment media impacts heterosexual audiences by decreasing perceived social distance between groups and increasing positive attitudes toward sexual minorities (e.g., Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005, 2006). When forming their *parasocial contact hypothesis*, Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) found that mediated contact with gay men via HBO's *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) and Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003-2007) resulted in lower levels of prejudice toward gay men

in general as measured by Herek's (1988) Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) instrument. These same effects were not found for attitudes toward lesbians, suggesting that the lower ATLG scores were specific to gay men as a result of the mediated contact with gay male characters. Given that these prosocial outcomes did not generalize to all sexual minorities, mediated contact may be an impractical solution for reducing prejudice toward certain members of the LGBT community who are chronically absent across media fare (e.g., bisexual males, transgender individuals).

Similar results were found in a later study where forced exposure to NBC's *Will and Grace* (1998-2006) was associated with lower ATLG scores in college students (Schiappa et al., 2006. This relationship was most pronounced for individuals with limited social contact with lesbians and gay men in their everyday lives. Building on this work, Bond and Compton (2014) conducted a survey study examining the relationship between media exposure and attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals. The correlation between exposure to LGB characters and endorsement of gay equality was stronger for university students who reported fewer than 3 close interpersonal relationships with members of the LGB community. The authors concluded that mediated contact with LGB characters on television reduced uncertainty for these audience members. These increased feelings of connectedness with sexual minority characters in turn bolstered endorsement of gay equality. Most recently, Sink and Mastro (2017) surveyed American adults and found that exposure to televised portrayals of gay men that aired between the years 2000 and 2015 was associated with lower levels of homonegativity, even when controlling for gender, religiosity, and real world contact with gay men

When taken together, these results offer initial support for the idea that vicarious contact with media portrayals can reduce prejudicial beliefs toward gay men, provided that those portrayals are perceived as being *positive* and *typical*. Although researchers in this domain have somewhat vaguely labeled characters from shows like *Will & Grace*, *Queer Eye*, and *Six Feet Under* as being good representations of the gay community, there are not consistent metrics used to quantitatively measure the *quality* of these portrayals. Thus, more work is needed in this domain to understand what type of characters (i.e., content features) can best facilitate positive contact. The extent to which media messages are effective in facilitating contact with other sexual minorities also remains unclear. As the next section will discuss, the stereotype content model offers a framework for evaluating the quality sexual minority characters.

Stereotype Content of Sexual Minorities

Previous work using stereotype content measures to classify sexual minorities has generally considered real world representations as opposed to media portrayals. This work has yielded mixed results, suggesting that sexual minorities are perceived ambivalently (i.e., as being deficient in either warmth or competence) or negatively (i.e, as being deficient in both warmth and competence). Some work has even classified the quality of media representations of social groups using warmth and competence (e.g., Sink et al., 2017). Thus, this past SCM work provides a comparative basis to assess the typicality or atypicality (i.e., quality) of media portrayals of sexual minorities. If a media character is evaluated as being deficient in either warmth or competence,

Stereotype Content of Gay Men. Fiske et al.'s (2002) first published work on SCM asked participants to classify gay men in terms of warmth and competence variables, with

results indicating that members of this group were perceived *neutrally* in the model (i.e., neither proficient nor deficient in warmth and competence). Expanding on these findings, Clausell and Fiske (2005) identified 10 specific subgroups of opposing stereotype content that helped explained the overall neutral perceptions of gay men when rated as a broader group. In line with their predictions, stereotypically masculine gay men were seen as LW-HC while effeminate representations were seen as HW-LC.

More recent work by Vaughn et al. (2016) found that gay men stereotyped as being higher in warmth than competence, though both of these measures averaged above 3.0 on a 5-point scale. In addition, Sink et al. (2017) examined the stereotype content of characterizations of gay men from a popular television sitcom. Results indicated that an effeminate portrayal was found to be warmer, less competent, and more stereotypical than his masculine counterpart. However, the authors noted that it would be misguided to label the effeminate characterization as deficient in competence given that he averaged above the midpoint of the 5-point competence scale. Thus, past work suggests that a stereotypical representation of a gay man will be perceived as being high warmth but moderately low in competence. Alternatively, a stereotypical gay man may be evaluated neutrally in terms of both warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002).

Stereotype Content of Lesbian Women. Interestingly, lesbian women were not among the 23 social groups examined in Fiske et al.'s (2002) original SCM work. However, later work has considered how lesbian women array in terms of perceived warmth and competence. When looking at lesbians as a homogenous group, there is variation in ratings of warmth and competence (Vaughn et al., 2016). These ratings range from positive (i.e., high competence and warmth), to ambivalent (i.e., high competence and low warmth), to

negative (i.e., low competence and warmth; Brambilla, Carnaghi, & Ravenna, 2011). The most recent work in this domain found that lesbian women were stereotyped as being lower in warmth than competence (Vaughn et al., 2016), mirroring perceptions of heterosexual men (Fiske et al., 2002). Thus, it is expected that a stereotypical lesbian television character will be perceived as being less warm than competent, or as being deficient in both warmth and competence.

Stereotype Content of Transgender Women. Transgender women (male-to-female) are rarely studied from a SCM perspective, perhaps due to this group's relative mainstream invisibility until recent years. In a study that predated recent advances in transgender visibility, Clausell and Fiske (2005) measured warmth and competence perceptions of male "cross-dressers." These men were evaluated as being low in both warmth and competence, and were amongst the most stigmatized subtypes of gay men. Of course, from a modern lens we know that transgender women, gay men, and cross-dressers/drag queens represent distinct (though sometimes overlapping) social identities. Still, this work provides preliminary evidence that gender non-conforming behaviors such as dressing as the opposite sex is associated with deficiencies in perceived warmth and competence.

More recently, Sink and Mastro (2016) found that college students evaluated transgender individuals as being low in both warmth and competence. However, in a survey of transgender stereotypes completed by 257 adults, Gazzola and Morrison (2014) argued that warmth and competence measures are ineffective in capturing the content of stereotypes of transgender men and women. This was because analyses from their data set failed to produce clear warmth and competence factor structures. Thus, although extant work in this

context is sparse, preliminary evidence exists that transgender individuals are perceived negatively in SCM (i.e., deficient in both warmth and competence.)

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of social scientific research that has examined media portrayals of sexual minorities. Much of this work has shown that sexual minorities are poorly represented across media fare in terms of sheer representation, with these characters frequently being criticized as negative or stereotypical representations. Still, there is little formal consensus with regard to what constitutes a positive, negative, or stereotypical representation of sexual minorities, and members of these distinct social groups are oftentimes referred to as a homogenous entity (e.g., member of the LGBT community). Additionally, much of this work has been criticized for lacking theoretical rigor. However, some scholars have drawn on mediated intergroup contact theory to explore how heterosexual audiences are impacted by exposure to gay male characters. These studies have offered compelling evidence that exposure to certain "positive" and "typical" portrayals of gay men can improve general attitudes held toward gay men in general. The stereotype content model, which focuses on the universal evaluative dimensions of stereotypes, was presented as a tool for evaluating the quality of representation of sexual minorities. Depending on his or her group, a character's deficiency in perceived warmth and/or competence could indicate typicality and portrayal valence, as established by past SCM work. Given that gay men, lesbian women, and transgender women have been found to array in distinct quadrants of the SCM, these groups are of both practical and theoretical interest when considering the relationships between stereotype content and intergroup contact presented in the previous chapter.

Chapter 3: Warmth, Competence, and the Optimal Conditions of Intergroup Contact (Study 1/Pilot Study)

In the first phase of this dissertation project, extensive pilot testing was undertaken to identify characterizations of gay men, lesbian women, and transgender individuals from popular media that varied in terms of stereotype content (i.e., warmth and competence). The ultimate goal of the pilot testing was to find sexual minority characters that students were able to accurately identify in terms of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and that mapped into their expected quadrant of the stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske et al., 2002). In addition, this pilot study collected data concerning relevant cognitive moderators of positive intergroup contact (*outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity/*acquaintance potential). This study sought to identify a gay male character that was high warmth/low competence (i.e., stereotypical), a gay male character that was high warmth/high competence (i.e., counter-stereotypical), a lesbian character that was low warmth/high competence (i.e., stereotypical), a lesbian character that was high warmth/high competence (i.e., counter-stereotypical), a transgender character that was low warmth/low competence (i.e., stereotypical), and a transgender character that was high warmth/high competence (i.e. counter-stereotypical). These characters then served as the stimuli for the remaining two studies. Results also indicated the extent to which warmth and competence character attributes are effective in predicting relevant optimal cognitive conditions of mediated intergroup contact.

The Optimal Conditions of Mediated Intergroup Contact

Researchers have begun exploring the effectiveness of indirect or *vicarious* contact strategies in improving intergroup relations. Park (2012) explains that *mediated intergroup contact* can occur when an audience member either (a) directly forms a mediated

relationship with an outgroup media character (i.e., *direct mediated contact*) or (b) indirectly forms a mediated relationship with an outgroup media character via an ingroup character that engages in positive interactions with the other characters belonging to the relevant social outgroup (i.e., *indirect mediated contact*). Scholars have argued that *identification* (i.e., "an imaginative experience in which a person surrenders consciousness of his or her identity and experiences the world through someone else's point of view"; Cohen, 2001, p. 248) and *parasocial interaction* (i.e., "the seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer"; Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215) are the two primary mechanisms through which these media effects takes place (Park, 2012). However, in order to understand whether there will be auspicious or negative outcomes of mediated contact, it is critical to consider the *quality* of the outgroup representation.

To further understand the necessary components of positive mediated contact, researchers have adapted Allport's (1954) four optimal contact conditions (i.e., equal status, common goals, cooperative, institutional support) to the domain of media effects research. In situations where audiences experience indirect mediated contact via ingroup characters, positive outcomes can be expected when the ingroup character (with whom an audience member either identifies or engages in parasocial interaction) and the outgroup character are presented in the narrative as sharing equal status and collaborating together to achieve a common goal under social approval (Park, 2012). Although the four classical contact conditions are clearly relevant to these indirect parasocial exchanges, their applicability to *direct* mediated contact with an outgroup character is less clear. Park (2012) argues that assessing the "compatibility in social status, goals, and working relationship is often difficult

to determine" for audiences and outgroup characters, given that they do not inhabit the same space and time (p. 147).

Instead, other moderating factors such as *acquaintance potential* (Cook, 1962) and *perceived typicality* can be applied to indirect contact exchanges. These conditions speak to the paradoxical need for outgroup characters to be presented as representative yet relatable personae. In other words, it is not sufficient to merely present minorities in the media in great quantity. Instead, to best facilitate positive mediated contact, an outgroup character must be seen as typical of their social group while fostering some sense of shared identity from which an audience member can begin to develop a meaningful parasocial relationship (Park, 2012). This balance can be difficult to achieve, given that people tend to accentuate their differences from members of highly stigmatized groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Drawing on tenants of social identity theories, past work in media stereotyping has already examined how variables related to a media character's perceived typicality (i.e., *prototypicality*) can influence generalized intergroup comparisons. When media characters are seen as typical of privileged social groups, they are often afforded status, esteem, and other identity-related benefits indicative of high acquaintance potential. In contrast, media figures from stigmatized groups are either (a) viewed as typical of their group and thus seen as less attractive/esteemed or (b) viewed as abnormal and thus are not recognized as representative members of their group (i.e., *subtyped*; e.g., Mastro & Kopacz, 2006; Mastro, Tamborini, & Hullett, 2005; Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Ramasubramanian, 2011). Thus, for members of stigmatized social groups, there appears to be an inverse relationship between t*ypicality* and *similarity* that can complicate the generalizability of positive mediated contact. However, meta-analytic work of the contact

hypothesis by McIntyre, Paolini, and Hewstone (2016) has established that positive contact effects are most generalizable when participants are exposed to several *moderately atypical* characterizations of a group. When considering mediated contact, then, it seems necessary for an outgroup character to be portrayed in such a way that clearly signals group membership, but not in such a blatantly stereotypical way that could prevent meaningful parasocial relationships due to perceived social distance.

In sum, Allport's four classical conditions for positive intergroup contact are especially relevant to assessing the quality of indirect mediated contact. However, these variables are less relevant to scholars interested in direct mediated contact with outgroup characters, given that comparing media characters to human audiences on attributes such as status and goals is difficult (Park, 2012). Instead, researchers have identified *acquaintance potential* and *outgroup typicality* as essential moderating variables to consider in this domain. Warmth and competence variables may assist researchers in evaluating these important cognitive moderators of direct mediated intergroup contact.

Stereotype Content, Ingroup Similarity, and Outgroup Typicality

As outlined in previous chapters, the stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske et al. 2002) is a valuable theoretical framework for scholars interested in media stereotypes. SCM provides several theoretical affordances to the study of media portrayals of marginalized groups, including providing standardized metrics for comparing members of diverse social groups and offering specific predictions concerning the emotional and behavioral outcomes of media exposure (Sink et al., 2017). An additional advantage of incorporating warmth and competence measures into media stereotypes research is that these measures may provide insights as to the degree to which a character has the potential to facilitate positive mediated

intergroup contact. Specifically, stereotype content can help to assess the 2 cognitive moderators of direct mediated contact: *ingroup similarity* (i.e., *acquaintance potential*) and *outgroup typicality*. Figure 1 depicts a model of the predicted relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of outgroup television characters with *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity*.

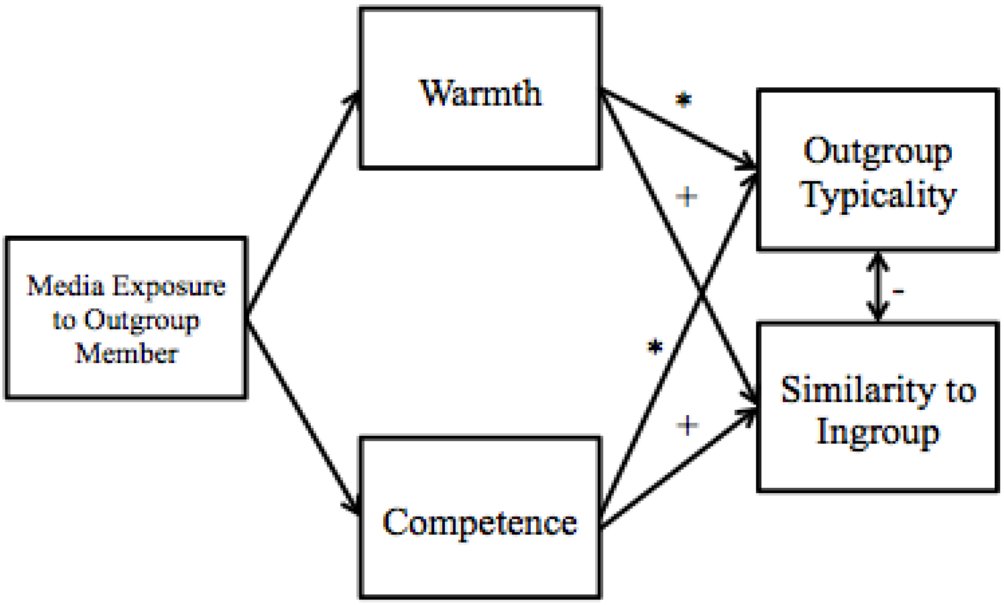

Figure 1. The proposed relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of a media character on outgroup typicality and similarity to ingroup. Asterisks indicate group-specific differences (see Figures 2-5).

Warmth, Competence, and Ingroup Similarity. In SCM research, warmth and competence are conceptualized as a set of prized evaluative dimensions from which we compare ourselves and members of our ingroups to salient social outgroups. Because of ingroup favoritism (see Yamagishi, Jin, & Kiyonari, 1999), or the well documented tendency for people to judge members of their own groups as superior to others, Fiske and colleagues (2002) argued that ingroup members and "close allies in a hostile world" would inhabit the prized high warmth/high competence quadrant of their model (p. 881). Because

warmth and competence are desirable traits, people evaluate members of their own social groups as being exemplary in both of these attributes. Culturally dominant reference groups in American society (e.g., the middle class, Whites, Christians) were also expected to be highly warm and competent. Their results (and subsequent SCM work) have supported these predictions (Fiske et al., 2002).

Thus, warmth and competence measures may be useful in establishing a media character's acquaintance potential, which is an important moderator of positive mediated intergroup contact. These measures of stereotype content tap into perceptions of intergroup status, values, and goodwill (hereby collectively referred to as *ingroup similarity*), and offer a standardized metric for comparing media figures to each other. Because people view their close friends and allies as being high in both warm and competence, audiences should feel stronger parasocial connections toward characters that exemplify these traits. Stated formally:

H1: Perceptions of a television character's warmth will be positively related to perceptions of ingroup similarity.

H2: Perceptions of a television character's competence will be positively related to perceptions of ingroup similarity.

Warmth, Competence, and Outgroup Typicality. Another benefit of incorporating SCM variables into research on media stereotypes is that extant SCM research provides a comparative basis to judge the typicality of a media character. Because extensive research in social psychology has explored how countless social groups are arranged in the model, it is possible to compare a character's warmth and competence with how members of his or her group are typically perceived. For example, housewives are traditionally stereotyped as

being high in warmth and deficient in competence (Fiske et al., 2002). Thus, audience members would rate a stereotypical media portrayal of a housewife in a similar manner (i.e., HW-LC) while an atypical portrayal would land in a different quadrant of the model (e.g., LW-HC). Importantly, the influence of warmth and competence judgments on notions of *outgroup typicality* will depend on what group the media character belongs to. Stated formally:

H3: Perceptions of a television character's warmth and competence will influence perceptions of outgroup typicality depending on location of that character's group in the stereotype content model (see Figures 2-5).

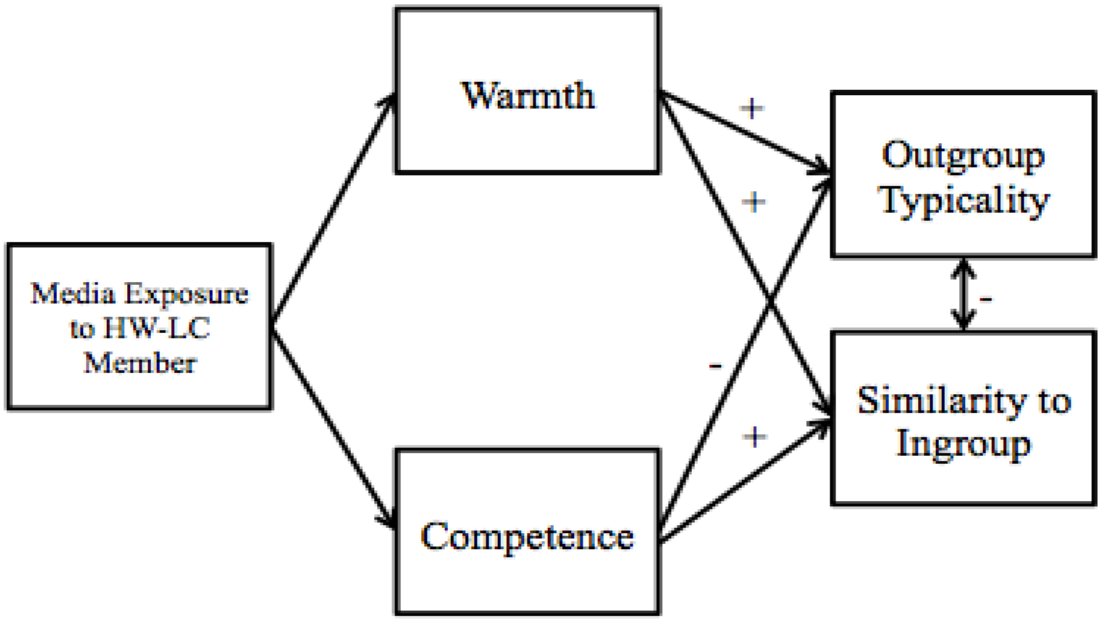

Figure 2. The proposed relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of a HW-LC media character (e.g., stereotypical, effeminate portrayals of gay men) on outgroup typicality and similarity to ingroup.

Previous work using stereotype content measures to classify sexual minorities have yielded mixed results, suggesting that sexual minorities are perceived ambivalently (i.e., as

being deficient in either warmth or competence) or negatively (i.e, as being deficient in both warmth and competence). As outlined in the previous chapter, past work (e.g., Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Sink et al., 2017) suggests that a stereotypical representation of a gay man will be perceived as being high warmth but moderately low in competence (mirroring evaluations of traditionally feminine women and housewives) or neutrally in terms of both warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002). Given the centrality of notions of gender nonconformity in antipathy toward gay men (Herek, 1984, 2000) and this study's goal of finding media characters that land in distinct quadrants of the SCM, the proposed relationships (Figure 2) assume ambivalent/paternalistic stereotype content (i.e., high warmth and low competence).

In addition, past research (e.g., Brambilla, Carnaghi, & Ravenna, 2011; Vaughn et al., 2016) has found that that lesbian women are perceived as less warm than competent (similar to traditionally masculine men, Fiske et al., 2002), or as being deficient in both warmth and competence. Again, as more masculine lesbian women are met with high degrees of prejudice for breaking gender norms (Herek, 1984, 2000) and this study's goal of finding media characters that land in distinct quadrants of the SCM, the proposed relationships (Figure 3) assume ambivalent/envious stereotype content (i.e., high competence and low warmth).

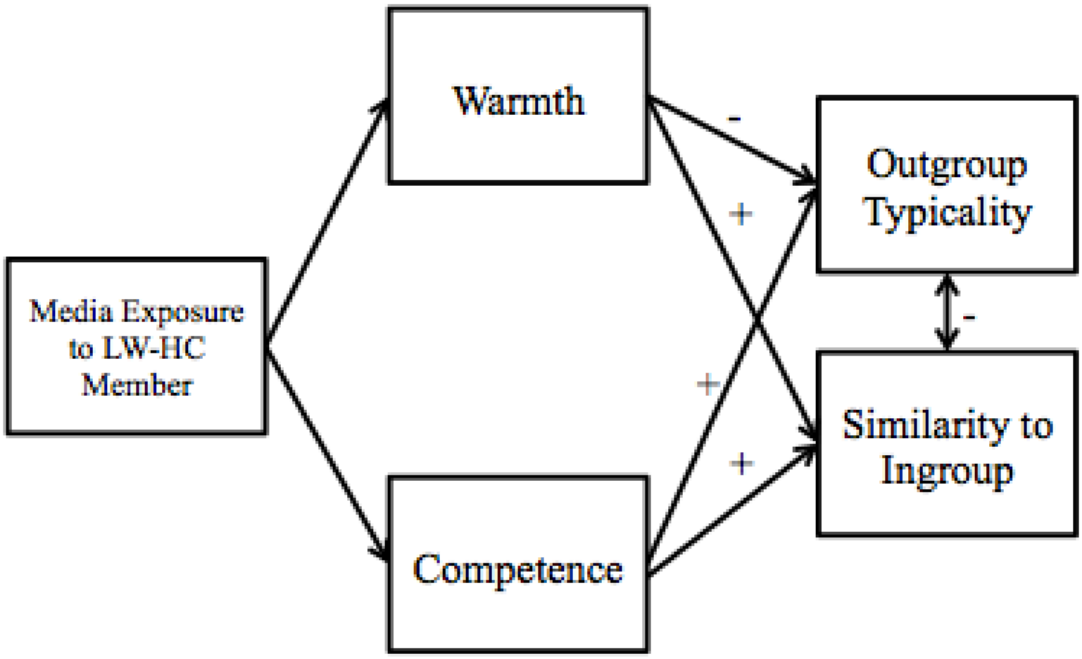

Figure 3. The proposed relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of a LW-HC media character (e.g., stereotypical portrayals of lesbian women) on outgroup typicality and similarity to ingroup.

Finally, some preliminary evidence exists that transgender individuals are perceived negatively in the SCM (i.e., deficient in both warmth and competence; Clausell & Fiske, 2005; Sink & Mastro, 2017c). However, other scholars have argued that warmth and competence are ineffective in measuring stereotypes for members of this group (Gazzola & Morrison, 2014). Though transgender individuals are understudied with regard to warmth and competence, the predictions presented in Figure 4 assume negative stereotype content (i.e., low warmth and low competence).

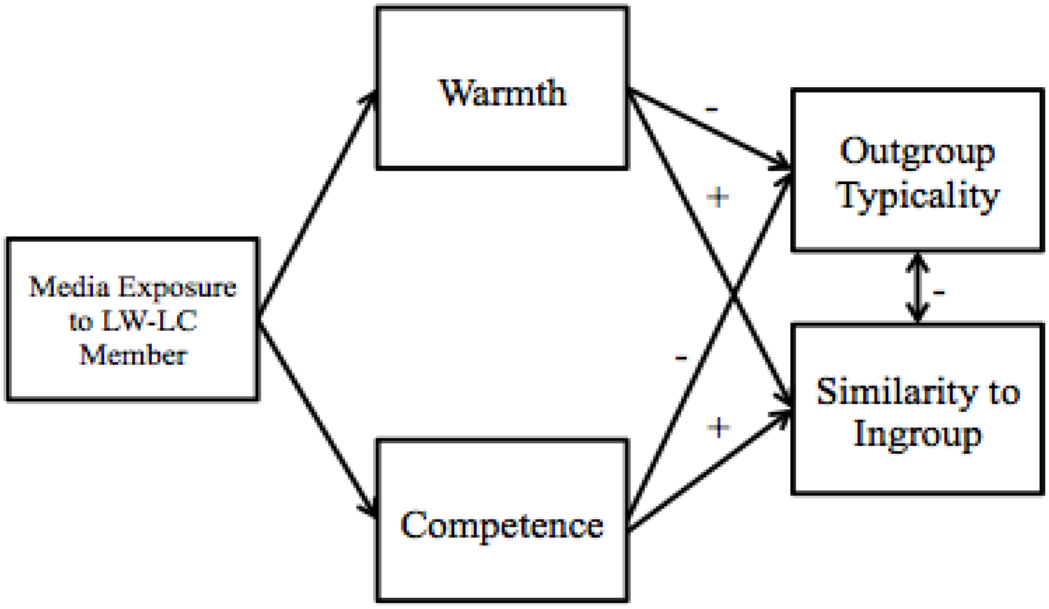

Figure 4. The proposed relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of a LW-LC media character (e.g., stereotypical portrayals of transgender individuals) on outgroup typicality and similarity to ingroup.

Outgroup Typicality and Ingroup Similarity. Research on social perception has found that when a social category becomes salient, it leads to self- and other-depersonalization, wherein an individual views themselves and others in terms of prototypes (i.e., sets of group-specific attributes and characteristics) that both define and contrast groups from each other (Hogg & Reid, 2006). To maintain positive social identity, people are motivated to create prototypes that favor their own groups and accentuate differences from social outgroups (Hogg, 1993). Thus, notions of group typicality are partially based on the extent to which a person is seen as possessing specific features that are distinct to a social outgroup, such as skin color or undesirable personality attributes (Andersen & Klatzky, 1987). Thus, "highly typical" outgroup members are perceived as fundamentally differing from the ingroup as they possess prototypical attributes that (by design) accentuate group-based differences. In contrast, less prototypical outgroup members (i.e., atypical outgroup members) may share more in common with the ingroup, given that their lack of

stereotypical features should make their outgroup identity less salient. With this in mind, Figures 1-4 present an inverse relationship between outgroup typicality and ingroup similarity. Stated formally:

H4: Perception's of a television character's outgroup typicality will be negatively related to perceptions of ingroup similarity.

Method: Study 1

Again, the primary goal of the pilot testing phase of this dissertation project was to find sexual minority characters that can be accurately identified in terms of their sexual orientation or gender identity (i.e., group membership), and that map into either their expected quadrant (i.e., stereotypical character) or unexpected quadrant (i.e., counter-stereotypical characters) of the SCM. In addition, the pilot study collected data concerning the cognitive mediators of positive intergroup contact (i.e., *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity*). In a research lab, subjects (N = 125) were exposed to multiple television clips featuring sexual minority characters before reporting their perceptions of each character on the variables of interest.

Participants

A total of 135 undergraduate students at a large public university on the West Coast took part in the pilot study on a voluntary and anonymous basis. The subjects were first asked to report basic demographic information. Given that SCM research is concerned with perceptions of social outgroups, students who identified as non-heterosexual (n = 10) or transgender (n = 0) were removed from analyses, resulting in a final sample of 125 heterosexual and cisgender students (*M* age = 19.19, 76.3% female). The students were predominately Asian (36.3%) and White (33.8%), with the remainder self-identifying as

Hispanic/Latino (8.9%), African American (2.3%), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1.5%), or as multi-ethnic/multi-racial (16.3%). A majority of the subjects reported their political affiliation with the Democratic Party (57.5%), followed by Independent (9.4%), the Republican Party (8.7%), "Other" (3.9%), and the Libertarian Party (2.4%). 18.1% of the students declined reporting their political affiliation. The final sample most commonly identified their religious beliefs as Christian (39.4%), followed by Agnostic (18.9%), Atheist (11.0%), "Other" (9.4%), Jewish (6.3%), and Muslim (2.4%). 11.8% of the sample refused to report their religious affiliation. All students received course credit for their participation and were debriefed on the goals of the study.

Procedure

In an audience observation research lab, participants were shown clips from television programs on a large projector. A research assistant collected cell phones and personal belongings to eliminate distractions during the screening before distributing paper questionnaires. After announcing that participants would be watching clips of gay men, lesbian women, and transgender individuals, a proctor would show a single clip and then direct students to answer questions measuring attributes of the character from the clip in their questionnaires. Once all students finished responding, the research assistant would play the next clip and repeat the procedure until data was collected for all characters.

Stimuli

The characters presented to participants were from popular reality television programs. Reality shows were used as they remain a popular staple in American media and feature several unique content elements that could help best facilitate mediated contact. First, these shows often claim to feature everyday people as contestants as opposed to the

fictional characters that inhabit scripted series. Thus, the contestants may be seen as more realistic representations of minorities than scripted characters, which should enhance the generalizability of the contact effects. In addition, contestants on reality shows often speak directly to the viewer in a manner similar to direct interpersonal communication. These asides, commonly referred to as *confessionals*, are frequently used in reality television programs to provide narration, exposition, and commentary on the ongoing action within the show (Murray, 2015). Finally, reality television shows have been frequently criticized in popular press for relying on stereotypes and tokenism (e.g., Lowry, 2010), and thus offered the largest potential sample of stereotypical sexual minority characters to draw from.

The stimuli in the pilot study featured the contestants introducing themselves and discussing various aspects of their lives outside of the show, such as their hometowns, personal relationships, careers, and ambitions. The clips ranged in length from 1 to 2 minutes, and featured the character of interest speaking directly to the camera in an isolated environment in the style of a confessional. The stimuli featured 6 gay men, 6 lesbian women, and 2 transgender women (male-to-female) from popular reality competition and lifestyle shows. To control for overlapping group memberships, characters were selected with similarities in key demographic variables (e.g., age, race). However, given the chronic scarcity of transgender characters across the media landscape (GLAAD, 2017), the transgender characters differed considerably in age.

The gay characters included Steven Daigle from *Big Brother 10* (CBS, 2008), Jason Roy from *Big Brother: Over the Top* (CBS, 2016), Colton Cumbie from *Survivor: One World* (CBS, 2011), Caleb Bankston from *Survivor: Blood vs. Water* (CBS, 2013), Robert Sepulveda Jr. from *Finding Prince Charming* (LogoTV, 2016), and Robby Larivieri from

Finding Prince Charming (LogoTV, 2016). The lesbian characters included Kitten Pinder from *Big Brother 5* (Channel 4, 2004), Lisa Wallace from *Big Brother 10* (Channel 4, 2009), Angel McKenzie from *Big Brother 10* (Channel 4, 2009), Willow MacDonald from *Big Brother Canada 3* (Global, 2015), Mikey Koffman from *The Real L Word* (Showtime, 2010), and Tracy Ryerson from *The Real L Word* (Showtime, 2010). Transgender characters are relatively uncommon in unscripted television content (GLAAD, 2017), and proved difficult to identify in this context. Thus, the students were exposed to only 2 transgender female (MTF) characters: Jazz Jennings from *I Am Jazz* (TLC, 2015-present) and Caitlyn Jenner from *I Am Cait* (E!, 2015-16). Although controversial political opinions and connections to the Kardasian family have certainly established Caitlyn Jenner as polarizing public figure, she still represents a highly salient transgender portrayal for the American public.

Measures

Demographic features. Participants were first asked to rate each character on several demographic variables, including *age* (under 20, 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, above 50), *sexual orientation* (Heterosexual, Gay/Lesbian, Bisexual, Unknown), and *gender identity* (Cisgender Male, Cisgender Female, Transgender Male FTM, Transgender Female MTF, Unknown). These measures were used to verify that subjects were able to correctly identify the character's sexual orientation or gender identity and to compare the characters to each other.

Warmth and competence. The subjects were next asked to evaluate each character with items commonly used in SCM research (e.g., Fiske et al., 1999; Fiske et al. 2002; Sanders & Sullivan, 2010). As with most SCM studies, warmth and competence were

conceptualized as psychological dimensions that are comprised of various personality attributes and characteristics. Specifically, students were asked to evaluate each character on the following traits: warm, helpful, trustworthy, kind, friendly, sincere, good-natured, moral, competitive, honest, likable, agreeable, sensitive, selfless, competent, skilled, intelligent, confident, industrious, creative, capable, status, powerful, self-motivated, and ambitious. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing low levels of the attribute and 5 representing high levels of the attribute of interest. Factor analyses were conducted to examine which items best assess the constructs of interest for each character, and scores were averaged to create composite warmth and competence scores (see Results).

Outgroup typicality. To assess perceptions of each character's typicality with regard to his or her salient social group, students were next asked to evaluate how *typical of [gay men, lesbian women, transgender individuals]* each character is using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all stereotypical; 7 = very stereotypical).

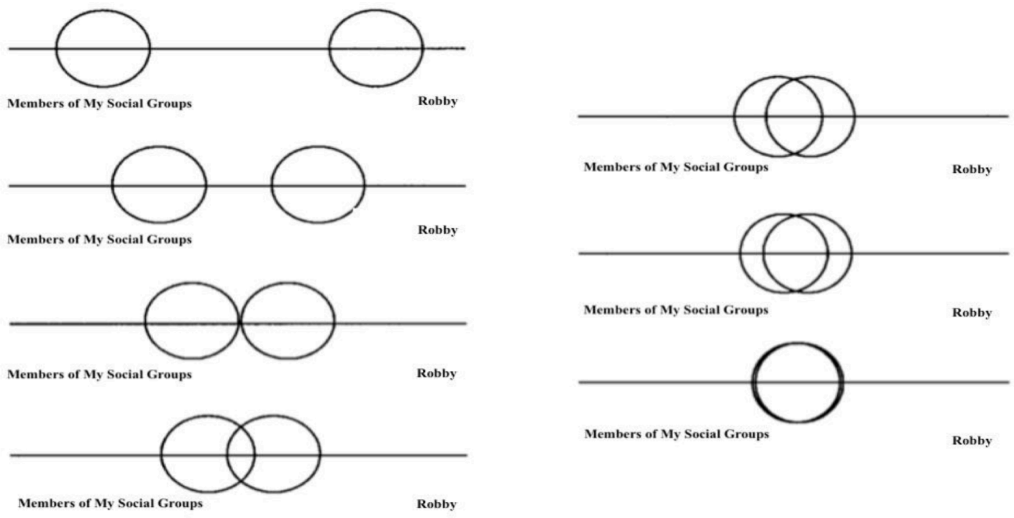

Figure 5. Adapted version of Schbert and Otten's (2002) assessment of ingroup-outgroup overlap scale.

Ingroup similarity. To assess perceptions of ingroup similarity, participants were first asked to rate how *similar* they felt to each character using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all; 7 = Very Much). Using an adapted version of Schubert and Otten's (2002) assessment of ingroup-outgroup overlap (see Figure 5), students were also instructed to circle the picture that best represented how similar members of their own social groups are to each character. These 2 items were averaged to create a composite measure of *ingroup similarity* (α =.79).

Other attributes of interest. Consistent with past work in this domain (Sink et al., 2017), *masculinity* and *femininity* were measured using 5-point Likert scales (1 = not at all; 5 = very much). In this study, these traits were used to compare the characters given their centrality to stereotypes of sexual minorities (Herek, 1984, 2000). Subjects were also asked to rate the extent to which they felt each character was a *positive portrayal* and a *realistic portrayal* of his/her social group using 7-point Likert scales (1 = not at all; 7 = very much).

Results: Study 1

Warmth and Competence Scale Construction

To construct warmth and competence scales, it was essential to verify that the items functioned for each social group separately, yet also overlapped across all groups in measuring the constructs of interest (Fiske et al., 2002). To this end, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with MPlus version 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2000-2017) using maximum likelihood (ML) estimation. Oblique promax rotation was selected over orthogonal rotation as it allows for the possibility that emergent factors (warmth and competence) are correlated. Chi-square test of model fit, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR), and factor loadings were used to determine the optimal factor model and fit across the gay, lesbian, and transgender characters using well-established guidelines in the interpretations of these tests (Brown, 2015; Fabringer, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Results indicated that across all characters, warmth was best assessed using the items *warm, kind, friendly,* and *likable* whereas competence was optimally measured using the items *competent, skilled, intelligent*, and *capable*. These results were comparable to the final stereotype scale items used by Cuddy et al. (2007) in a national phone survey of stereotype content. As such, these items were averaged to create the final *warmth* ($\alpha = .93$) and *competence* ($\alpha = .87$) measures.

Descriptive Analyses of Character Demographics and Attributes

Descriptive statistics and frequencies were used to both verify that participants accurately identified each character as belonging to the correct social group and to compare the characters to each other on variables of interest (see Table 1).

Table 1
Evaluations of Sexual Minority Characters (Pilot Study)

Character	Age	Sexual Or.	Gender	Typicality	Warmth	Competence	Similarity	Masculinity	Femininity	Positive
Gay Men										
Caleb Bankston	2.19	99.1%	93.5%	2.50	4.09	3.70	2.67	4.32	1.41	5.29
Steven Daigle	2.33	97.8%	91.1%	2.64	3.96	4.02	2.89	4.59	1.42	5.64
Robert Sepulveda Jr.*	3.01	89.8%	93.5%	3.55	4.41	4.31	3.34	4.18	1.88	6.09
Colton Cumbie*	2.07	89.7%	90.7%	5.22	2.97	2.93	2.07	2.31	3.60	3.76
Robby Larivieri	2.11	100.0%	88.9%	5.60	4.32	3.81	2.29	2.63	3.84	5.42
Jason Roy	1.94	91.9%	85.9%	5.61	3.64	3.57	2.22	2.02	3.92	4.72
Lesbian Women										
Willow MacDonald	2.09	93.5%	93.5%	3.48	4.39	3.72	3.49	1.50	4.38	5.83
Tracy Ryerson*	2.66	92.6%	92.6%	3.75	4.55	4.05	3.56	1.36	4.67	6.12
Lisa Wallace	3.97	71.3%	71.3%	4.35	2.69	2.91	1.31	4.44	1.61	3.03
Angel McKenzie	3.03	78.7%	78.7%	4.37	2.72	3.95	1.64	4.12	1.79	4.29
Kitten Pinder*	2.04	83.3%	83.3%	4.94	2.52	3.80	1.89	3.62	2.36	3.75
Mikey Koffman	3.68	88.8%	88.8%	5.15	3.76	4.24	2.45	3.76	2.57	5.36
Transgender Women										
Jazz Jennings*	1.07	96.3%	96.3%	4.56	4.38	3.71	2.84	1.36	4.53	6.13
Caitlyn Jenner*	5.54	99.1%	99.1%	4.51	2.61	3.34	1.41	2.59	3.93	3.66

Note. Asterisks indicate that that the character was chosen to serve as stimuli for Studies 2 and 3. The Sex Orientation and Gender percentages represent the proportion of participants that correctly identified these demographic features.

Gay men. Descriptive statistics revealed that 3 of the gay male characters were perceived as being low in *typicality* (*Ms* < 4.0; Caleb, Steven, Robert), whereas the remaining 3 contestants (Colton, Robby, Jason) were seen as being high in *typicality* (*Ms* > 5.00). The atypical characters were given relatively high scores in masculinity (*Ms* > 4.00) and low scores in femininity (*Ms* < 2.00). Conversely, the highly typical gay characters were given high scores in femininity (*M* > 3.50) and low scores in masculinity (*M* < 3.00). The atypical characters (*Ms* < 4.00) were also seen as being among the most positive representations of gay men (*Ms* > 5.20), and as being high in both warmth (*Ms* > 3.90) and competence (*Ms* > 3.70). The typical gay male characters (*Ms* > 5.00) were more likely than the atypical characters to be misidentified as transgender or have their gender identity marked as "unknown".

Lesbian women. Results revealed that 2 of the lesbian characters (i.e., Willow and Tracy) were perceived as being moderately typical (*Ms* < 4.00) and the remaining 4 (i.e., Lisa, Angel, Kitten, Mikey) were seen as high in typicality (*Ms* > 4.30). The atypical characters (*Ms* < 4.00) were given relatively high scores in femininity (*Ms* > 4.30) and low

scores in masculinity (*Ms* < 1.60). Conversely, the highly typical (*Ms* > 4.30) lesbian characters were given high scores in masculinity (*M* > 3.60) and low scores in femininity (*M* < 2.60). The atypical characters were also seen as being among the most positive representations of lesbian women (*Ms* > 5.20), and as being high in both warmth (*Ms* > 4.30) and competence (*Ms* > 3.70). The typical lesbian characters were more likely than the atypical characters to be mislabeled as transgender or have their gender identity marked as "unknown".

Transgender women. Importantly, the 2 transgender characters were evaluated as being moderately typical portrayals of trans women. Jazz was evaluated as being less masculine and more feminine that Caitlyn. In a similar vein, Jazz was seen as being warmer, more competent, and a more positive portrayal of transgender women than Caityln.

Path Analysis and Modeling

To test the predicted relationships between perceptions of the characters' warmth, competence, and the optimal conditions of mediated intergroup contact (i.e., typicality and similarity; **H1-4**), a series of 3 path analyses was conducted using MPlus version 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2000-2017). Path analysis was chosen over structural equation modeling (SEM), as the major variables of interest were comprised of composite measures and not treated as latent constructs. One path analysis was conducted for each group of interest (e.g., gay men, lesbian women, transgender women). Participants with missing values were eliminated after imputation. Less than 1% of the sample had missing values for the variables of interest and thus < 1% of the sample was eliminated after imputation. Chi-square test of model fit, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) were used to determine the optimal

structure and fit. Conventional guidelines were used in the interpretations of these tests. The chi-square test is known to be sensitive to large sample sizes, and in these instances it can be acceptable to retain models with significant chi-square values (Fabringer, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999). As the samples used in this study were relatively large, it was expected that chi-square values would remain significant. Hu and Bentler (1999) state that SRMR values less than .08 suggest reasonable model fit, and values less than .05 suggest good model fit. Though some argue that RMSEA should be no greater than .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), Brown (2015) suggests that RMSEA values < .08 and CFI between .90 and .95 suggest reasonable model fit, while RMSEA < .05 accompanied by CFI scores greater than .95 indicate good fit.

Gay male characters. The final sample size of gay character evaluations for the analysis after imputation was n = 698. The results of the path analysis with the standardized regression coefficients for *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity* are presented in Figure 6. This model has strong fit $\chi^2(5) = 135.41$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, and SRMR = 0.00. Figure 6 indicates that perceptions of both *warmth* ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$) and *competence* ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$) had a significant direct effect on feelings of *intergroup similarity*. The positive valence of these relationships offers preliminary support for H1 and H2. Furthermore, while *competence* ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .001$) had a significant negative effect on perceptions of outgroup typicality, the relationship between *warmth* and typicality was non-significant ($\beta = .01$, $p = .79$). Although H3 predicted that highly typical gay characters would be high in warmth and low in competence, these results suggest that only competence is a significant negative predictor of outgroup typicality. As expected, a significant negative

relationship between *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity* emerged (β = -.13, $p <$ .001), offering preliminary support for **H4**.

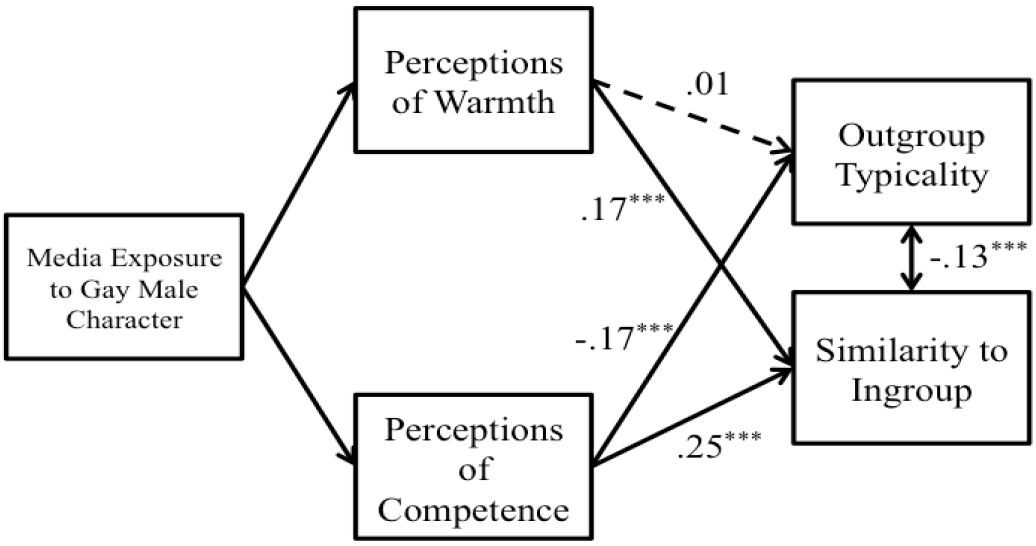

Figure 6. Path diagram depicting the influence of warmth and competence perceptions of gay television characters (N = 698) on outgroup typicality and ingroup similarity. Significant paths ($p < .05$) are denoted by solid lines and an asterisk; non-significant effects are denoted by dashed lines.

Lesbian characters. The final sample size of lesbian character evaluations for the analysis after imputation was n = 646. The results of the path analysis with the standardized regression coefficients for *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity* are presented in Figure 7.

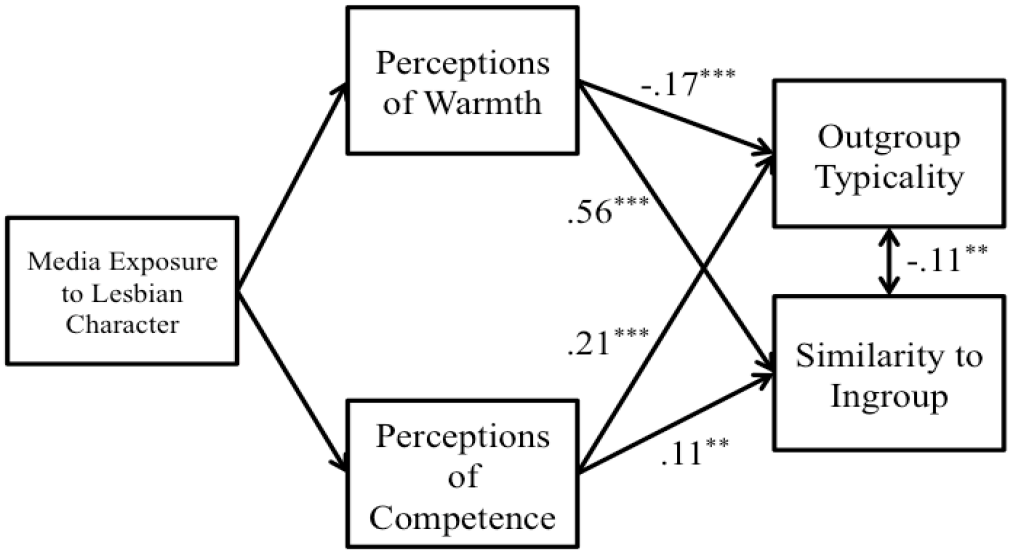

Figure 7. Path diagram depicting the influence of warmth and competence perceptions of lesbian television characters (N = 646) on outgroup typicality and ingroup similarity. Significant paths ($p < .05$) are denoted by solid lines and an asterisk; non-significant effects are denoted by dashed lines.

This model also has strong fit $\chi^2(5) = 330.47$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, and SRMR = 0.00. Figure 7 also indicates that perceptions of both *warmth* ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$) and *competence* ($\beta = .11$, $p < .01$) have a positive direct effect on feelings of *intergroup similarity*, offering additional support for H1 and H2. In addition, *competence* ($\beta = .21$ $p < .001$) had a significant positive effect on perceptions of outgroup typicality, whereas the significant relationship between *warmth* and typicality was negative ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .001$). These findings offer support for H3, as SCM literature has found that lesbians are stereotyped as being high in competence and low in warmth. As predicted, a significant negative relationship between *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity* emerged ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .01$), offering further support for H4.

Transgender female characters. The final sample size of transgender character evaluations for the analysis after imputation was n = 216. The results of the path analysis with the standardized regression coefficients for *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity* are

presented in Figure 8. Again, this model has strong fit $\chi^2(5) = 85.08$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = 0.00, CFI = 1.00, and SRMR = 0.00. Figure 8 indicates that only perceptions of a transgender character's *warmth* ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$) have a positive direct effect on feelings of *intergroup similarity* offering additional support for H1. However, the relationship between competence and similarity was non- significant for these characters ($\beta = -.06$, $p = .34$). Neither *warmth* ($\beta = .10$, $p = .19$) nor *competence* ($\beta = .05$, $p = .55$) significantly impacted evaluations of *outgroup typicality*, contrary to H3 which predicted these variables would have negative relationships. Although the relationship between *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity* was negative, it failed to achieve statistical significance.

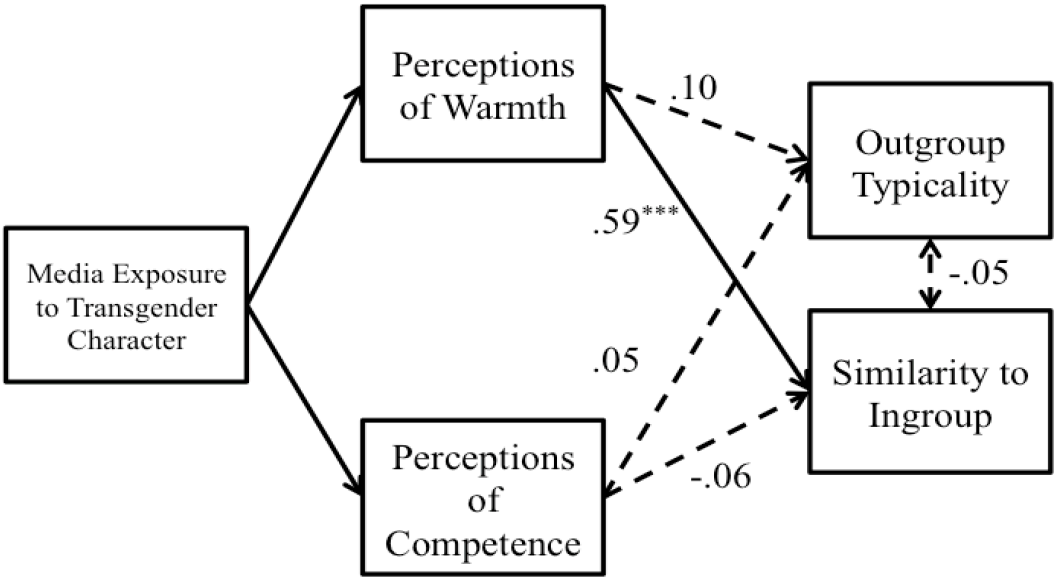

Figure 8. Path diagram depicting the influence of warmth and competence perceptions of female transgender (MTF) television characters (N = 216) on outgroup typicality and ingroup similarity. Significant paths ($p < .05$) are denoted by solid lines and an asterisk; non-significant effects are denoted by dashed lines.

Discussion: Study 1

The goals of this pilot testing were to (a) find sexual minority characters from popular media that could be accurately identified in terms of their sexual orientation or

gender identity (i.e., *group membership*), (b) explore how these characterizations arrayed in terms of their expected warmth and competence (i.e., *stereotype content*), and (c) test the effectiveness of warmth and competence variables in predicting certain optimal conditions of direct mediated intergroup contact (i.e., *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity*). In terms of the first goal, the pilot testing was largely successful. As the data presented in Table 1 indicates, the participants were generally able to correctly identify each character's sexual orientation and gender identity. However, important group-based differences emerged with regard to expected stereotype content and the effectiveness of perceived warmth and competence in predicting the cognitive moderators of mediated intergroup contact.

Gay Male Characters

In comparison to the other social groups, participants responded most favorably to the gay male reality show contestants. Although some variance existed in terms of the perceived typicality, masculinity, and femininity of these portrayals, they had the highest average scores for warmth evaluations. Though the lesbian characters had the highest average competence scores, only one of the gay characters (*Survivor*'s Colton Cumbie) would be classified as "low" in competence with a score below 3.0 on the 5-point scale. Thus, when considering the affective and behavioral predictions afforded by the BIAS map (Cuddy et al., 2007), these characters would be expected to elicit feelings of pride, admiration, and helping behaviors.

Cumbie (the gay character on *Survivor*) was also the only character to fall beneath the midpoint of the 7-point *positive portrayal* scale, which suggests that these characters were generally seen as being good representations of gay men. The remaining five characters had moderately high to very high scores on the warmth and competence items,

indicating that majority of these men would be classified in the prized high warmth/high competence quadrant of the SCM. As this quadrant is reserved for ingroup members and close allies, it appears that this predominately female and majority liberal sample of university students view gay men as an esteemed and non-threatening social group. Fiske and colleagues (2002) also argued culturally dominant reference groups such as Whites, Christians, and the middle class fall into this quadrant. In their original studies, gay men were classified neutrally in terms of warmth and competence. Nearly two decades later, these results suggest gay men have gained prominence as a more dominant and respected social group for some classes in the population.

Research indicates that effeminate gay men are often judged more negatively than those who adhere to heteronormative notions of masculinity (e.g., Madon, 1997; Page & Yee, 1985; Salvati, Ioverno, Giacomatonio, & Baiocco, 2016). This suggests that discomfort with gender nonconformity (i.e., men behaving in a feminine manner) is a major contributing factor to stereotypes and prejudice held toward gay men (Herek, 2000). Although the two characters with the highest femininity scores (*Finding Prince Charming*' Robby and *Big Brother*'s Jason) were also given the highest typicality scores, they were still seen as being warm, competent, and positive representations of gay men. In contrast, *Survivor'*s Colton was also granted relatively high femininity and typicality scores, but was met with the lowest warmth, competence, and positive portrayal evaluations. These findings suggest that a gay male character's deficiencies in warmth and competence may be more indicative of antipathy than the degree to which he deviates from traditional gender roles.

Some past SCM research has found that effeminate gay men are perceived as being more stereotypical (Sink et al., 2017), warmer, and less competent (Clausell & Fiske, 2005;

Sink et al., 2017) than their masculine counterparts. Therefore, it was assumed (Figure 2) that highly typical gay men would be stereotyped similarly to housewives and the elderly (i.e., high in warmth and low in competence; Fiske et al., 2002). However, results of the path analysis (Figure 6) indicated that warmth evaluations were not a significant predictor of outgroup typicality for these characters. This finding is likely due to the fact that the more masculine, atypical gay characters received high scores in both warmth and competence. Still, competence deficiency was a significant indicator of group typicality, providing partial support for the proposed relationships between warmth, competence, and outgroup typicality for gay television characters. At the intergroup level, competence represents the extent to which a social group is seen as being dominant or subordinate in relation to other groups. It would appear, then, that effeminate gay men fall below more "straight-acting" gay men in the status hierarchy. Thus, these results suggest that to be "typically gay" is to be a member of a relatively low status group.

Warmth and competence evaluations also were posited to be positively related to perceptions of ingroup similarity (Figure 2), as people believe members of their own social groups are exemplified by high levels of both of these variables (Fiske et al., 2002). Results of the path analysis (Figure 6) strongly supported these predictions; audience members who evaluated a character as being high in warmth and competence were more likely to also report feelings of group closeness and identify personal similarities. Thus, warmth and competence variables were effective at subtly measuring psychological closeness with these characters. Also as predicted, there was a significant negative relationship between outgroup typicality and feelings of ingroup similarity. Therefore, it would appear that heterosexual audience members are less likely to feel close to effeminate and less competent

representations of gay men than masculine characterizations that exude both warmth and competence.

In sum, the pilot study was effective in identifying gay male characters that differed in terms of stereotype content and outgroup typicality. Results showed that competence was effective in predicting gay typicality - an important cognitive moderator of mediated contact intergroup contact - whereas warmth evaluations has less of an influence than expected for these characters. The primacy of competence over warmth evaluations here suggests that 'typical' gay men are defined in part by lower levels of perceived status rather than estimations of intergroup threat. Both warmth and competence evaluations were effective in predicting ingroup similarity, another important optimal condition of mediated intergroup contact. From this theoretical lens, highly warm and competent gay characters would be expected to better facilitate the benefits of positive contact than more effeminate, typical, and less competent portrayals.

Lesbian Characters

Although not as positively received as the gay male characters, the lesbian reality show contestants had the highest average competence scores. Again, some variance existed in terms of perceptions of the typicality, masculinity, femininity, and portrayal valence of these characters. Only 2 of the lesbian characters fell below the midpoint of the 7-point typicality scale, with the remaining 4 women receiving moderately high scores on this measure. Thus, the majority of these characters were seen as being relatively stereotypical portrayals of lesbians. With the exception of *The Real L Word*'s Mikey Hoffman (who received strong typicality, warmth, and competence scores), the most typical characters were seen as being the least positive portrayals of lesbian women. Though only one character (*Big*

Brother's Lisa Wallace) scored unfavorably in terms of both warmth and competence, the remaining characters were evaluated positively or ambivalently in terms of stereotype content. In general, the highly typical characters received high competence and low warmth evaluations whereas the atypical contestants were deficient in warmth. Thus, in contrast to findings from the gay male characters, clearer divisions emerged in terms of where lesbian characters arrayed in the SCM. When considering the BIAS map (Cuddy et al., 2007), the atypical characters would be expected to prompt admiration and helping behaviors while the typical lesbian characters could elicit envy, active harm, and passive facilitation.

In contrast to work concerning gay men, researchers have found that lesbian women are stereotyped as being hyper-masculine (Eliason, Donelan, & Randall, 1992) and lesbians with feminine appearances are evaluated more positively than those with more traditionally masculine features (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997). Again, it would seem that notions of gender nonconformity contribute to the formation of stereotypes and prejudice toward lesbians. In a similar vein, the two characters with the highest femininity scores were rated as being the most positive representations of lesbian women while those with high masculinity scores tended to be seen as more negative portrayals. However, Hoffman (a lesbian character from *The Real L-Word*) was an important anomaly among these characters, as she received high masculinity, warmth, competence, and positive portrayal scores. These results add further support to the notion that warmth and competence measures are more reliable in assessing evaluative responses toward sexual minority television characters than measures of deviance from traditional gender roles.

Given that past SCM research concerning lesbians has found that these women are stereotyped similarly to traditionally masculine men (i.e., highly competent and cold;

Vaughn et al., 2016), it was predicted that lesbian typicality would be characterized by high levels of competence and low levels of warmth (Figure 3). Results of the path analysis (Figure 7) offered compelling support for these predictions; competence evaluations of the lesbian characters were positively related to measures of outgroup typicality while a negative relationship emerged for warmth evaluations. In the intergroup arena, warmth is indicative of how competitive a group is with regard to limited resources. Thus, these findings showed that highly typical lesbian women are perceived as being a threatening and high status group by this sample of predominately female undergraduate students.

In an almost exact replication of the results from the sample of gay male characters, the predictions represented in Figure 3 concerning the relationships between warmth, competence, and perceptions of ingroup similarity were also strongly supported. Specifically, participants were more likely to report feelings of personal and social similarity with a lesbian television character if she scored highly in both warmth and competence (Figure 6). Again, warmth and competence variables appear to have a high degree of utility in assessing this moderating variable of positive mediated intergroup contact. Additionally (and as predicted), another significant, negative relationship emerged between outgoup typicality and ingroup similarity, suggesting that atypically warm representations of lesbian women can foster enhanced feelings of psychological closeness when compared to cold and competent portrayals.

To summarize, this pilot testing was able to identify lesbian characters of differing stereotype content and outgroup typicality. Warmth and competence character evaluations were effective predictors of group typicality for these women, offering further evidence that lesbian women are stereotyped ambivalently as being cold and competent. Additionally,

stereotype content measures were able to predict feelings of ingroup similarity in audience members. When considering mediated intergroup contact theory, these results suggest that lesbian characters that exemplify both warmth and competence would be expected to more effectively facilitate the benefits of positive intergroup contact than more typical, masculine, and cold representations.

Transgender Female Characters

Though the predictions concerning role of warmth and competence evaluations on the cognitive moderators of mediated contact were largely supported for the gay and lesbian reality television characters, those with reference to transgender female characters (Figure 4) were decidedly less successful (see Figure 7). This lack of significant findings could potentially be explained by the small number of transgender character that subjects were exposed to during the study. Due to the scarcity of transgender representation across American media, only two clips of transgender women were selected and ultimately included in this study for being of comparable tone and quality to the gay and lesbian characters. Importantly, participants were exposed to six characterizations of gay men and lesbian women respectively. As a result, there were significantly fewer discrete character evaluations imputed into the transgender path model than into the gay and lesbian models. Still, these results do offer important theoretical contributions to the small number of studies that have empirically examined transgender stereotypes.

Participants were able to identify the gender identity of these two characters with an impressive degree of accuracy. Descriptive analyses revealed that these portrayals differed on several of the key variables of interest. Specifically, Jazz Jennings was evaluated as being significantly younger, less masculine, and more feminine than Caitlyn Jenner. Additionally,

Jennings was perceived as being a more positive representation of transgender women than Jenner. In terms of stereotype content, significant differences in warmth and competence did emerge between these two characters. Jennings was evaluated positively with strong warmth and competence scores while Jenner was seen as being cold and moderately competent. As such, Jenner, the more masculine figure, was evaluated consistently with members of her biological sex (i.e., cisgender males) whereas participants regarded the younger and more feminine woman as an ingroup member and close ally. The BIAS map would predict that Jennings would be met with feelings of pride, admiration, and helping behaviors while Jenner could elicit contemptuous envy, active harm, and passive facilitation.

Based on the limited pool of empirical studies that document transgender stereotype content, female transgender characters were assumed to have negative stereotype content (Figure 4). As such, the model predicted that transgender typicality would be defined by deficiencies in both warmth and competence. Importantly, though, neither of these characters were evaluated as being highly typical or atypical representations of the transgender community, with their mean scores for this measure landing barely above the midpoint of the 7-point scale. This lack of variability in typicality could also help to explain the non-significant findings presented in Figure 7, with results of the path analysis revealing that neither warmth nor competence character evaluations were significant predictors of outgroup typicality. Because transgender individuals have only recently begun to gain prominence in American media and the public consciousness, it is possible that the prototypical features of a transgender woman have not yet been culturally established. Alternatively, Jennings and Jenner may lack the prototypical attributes of transgender

women that another unknown character that was absent from the pilot study (perhaps from scripted entertainment) may exemplify.

These findings offer additional support to work by Gazzola and Morrison (2014) that argued warmth and competence measures are ineffective in measuring transgender stereotype content. After warmth and competence measures failed to reliably differentiate transgender men and women in a series of surveys, they instead turned to group-specific stereotypes. Their results suggested that most commonly endorsed cultural stereotypes of transgender women were notions of them being confused, born in the wrong body, gay, butch, and social outcasts (p. 90). Although these attributes are highly group-specific and fail to tap into the universal dimensions of stereotypes, researchers interested in furthering research in this domain may benefit from incorporating measures of these attributes into their work. This would be a highly valuable endeavor when considering the troubling lack of empirical work that seeks to document transgender stereotypes.

Warmth and competence evaluations of the transgender characters were also predicted to be positively related to perceptions of ingroup similarity and that typicality and similarity would be negatively to each other (Figure 4). However, results revealed that only the relationship between warmth and ingroup similarity was significant. Again, the failure of the other paths to reach statistical significance may simply be due to the relatively small number of characters imputed into the path model, especially when considering the compelling results from the gay and lesbian models. Still, the strong relationship between warmth and and ingroup similarity for these characters speaks to the value of presenting transgender women across the media fare as being warm, kind, and friendly.

In sum, though the pilot testing was effective in identifying female transgender characters of varying stereotype content, neither of these characters was evaluated as being a typical representation of their social group. As such, neither warmth nor competence were predictive of group typicality for these two characters. However, warmth evaluations were effective in predicting ingroup similarity. As results indicated that Jennings had an advantage over Jenner in both warmth and competence, these findings further suggest that she would potentially be more effective in producing positive mediated intergroup contact. These mixed findings demonstrate the need for more rigorous empirical examinations of transgender stereotype content as members of this group continue to gain visibility in American society.

Summary

To conclude, the success of the pilot testing was largely group dependent. Across all groups, participants were able to identify each character in terms of their respective sexual orientation or gender identity with a relatively high degree of accuracy. Thus, the clips of sexual minority characters from reality shows were effectively able to convey information pertaining to each character's social group membership. To this end, the first goal of pilot testing was a success. Subjects exposed to these clips are highly likely to correctly identify the relevant aspects of that character's identity.

This study was also successful in identifying characterizations of gay men, lesbian women, and transgender women that arrayed into district quadrants of the stereotype content model. However, it must be noted that the clips were unsuccessful in presenting characterizations of gay men and transgender women that fell into their anticipated quadrant based on past research (high warmth/low competence and low warmth/low competence,

respectively). Still, characters emerged from these groups that should theoretically produce unique affective and behavioral outcomes. Thus, this study's secondary goal was partially successful.

This study also sought to test the effectiveness of stereotype content measures in predicting certain variables that have been identified as moderators of positive mediated intergroup contact. For the lesbian characters, warmth and competence were both highly effective in predicting outgroup typicality and ingroup similarity. For the gay male characters, warmth and competence were significant predictors of ingroup similarity. However, findings suggested that only competence evaluations differentiate typical and atypical gay characters. Because neither of the transgender characters was perceived as being a typical portrayal, measures of stereotype content were found to be ineffective in predicting outgroup typicality. However, warmth evaluations were indicative of ingroup similarity for these characters. Furthermore, this study provided substantiation to the notion that stereotype content measures are more reliable in assessing evaluative responses toward sexual minorities than variables related to gender nonconformity. Indeed, certain effeminate gay and masculine lesbian characters were rated as being positive representations of their social groups, which was reflected in their warmth and competence scores. In sum, this work offers promising evidence for integrating insights from the SCM and intergroup contact.

Stimulus Selection for Studies 2 & 3

Importantly, the ultimate goal of this first phase was to establish criteria for the selection of stimuli for studies 2 and 3, which seek to explore the influence of warmth and competence character evaluations on (a) the affective mediators of intergroup contact and (b) the overall effectiveness of mediated contact in reducing prejudice. These studies require

characters from each social group of differing stereotype content. Fortunately, the transgender characters fell into different SCM quadrants: high warmth/high competence and low warmth/moderate competence. Although neither portrayal was seen as being typical of transgender women, they represent positive and ambivalent stereotype content. Therefore, exploring differences in responses to *I am Jazz*'s Jazz Jennings and *I am Cait*'s Caitlyn Jenner is still of theoretical interest.

The Real L Word's Tracy Ryerson and *Big Brother*'s Kitten Pinder were selected to serve as stimuli for the lesbian conditions. Of all 6 of the lesbian characters, Ryerson was most well received. She was awarded the highest warmth, competence, and positive portrayal scores and was also seen as being a moderately atypical representation of lesbians in general. Ultimately, this character met all the criteria for representing positive stereotype content for lesbian women. In contrast, Pinder received the lowest warmth scores of all the characters and was among the least positive representations of lesbian women. Her relatively high competence and typicality scores demonstrated that she was an effective representation of ambivalent stereotype content for lesbians, as she clearly falls into the low warmth/high competence quadrant.

Finally, *Finding Prince Charming*'s Robert Sepulveda Jr. and *Survivor*'s Colton Cumbie were chosen as stimuli for the gay male conditions. Sepulveda Jr. was awarded the highest warmth, competence, and positive portrayal scores of all six of the gay characters. He was also evaluated as being a moderately atypical representation of gay men in general. Therefore, he was deemed to be the most effective gay character at conveying positive stereotype content. With the exception of Cumbie, the remaining four gay characters also arrayed into the high warmth/high competence quadrant of the theoretical model. In

contrast, Cumbie was given moderately low scores in both warmth and competence, indicative of the neutral evaluations of gay men found in early SCM research (Fiske et al., 2002). Participants also rated him as being highly typical of gay men, yet also as being the least positive representation of all six characters. With these factors in mind, he was chosen to represent negative stereotype content for gay men. Thus, the pilot testing resulted in positively stereotyped gay, lesbian, and transgender characters, ambivalently stereotyped lesbian and transgender characters, and a negatively stereotyped gay male character. Study 2 will explore the different intergroup emotions elicited by these characters.

Chapter 4: Warmth, Competence, and the Affective Mediators of Intergroup Contact (Study 2)

Allport (1954) originally argued that intergroup contact was primarily a cognitive experience. He believed that positive intergroup communication would lead to increased *learning* about social outgroups. These new cognitions would ultimately lead to improved attitudes about members of social outgroups. However, meta-analytic work has found that *affective* processes more strongly mediate the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice than cognitive processes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Specifically, intergroup contact is believed to operate via 3 key intergroup emotions: *anxiety* (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), *empathy* (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), and *trust* (Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2009; Turner, West, & Christie, 2013; Visintin, Voci, Pagotto, & Hewstone, 2017). Research on stereotype content has documented that warmth and competence perceptions of social outgroups are predictive of certain intergroup emotions (i.e, admiration, pity, envy, contempt; Cuddy et al., 2007). However, past work has not explored the influence of warmth and competence evaluations on the affective mediators of intergroup contact.

This experimental study attempts to address that shortcoming by exploring emotional reactions to media portrayals of sexual minorities that were found to differ in terms of stereotype content after extensive pilot testing (see Study 1). Participants were randomly assigned to view characters of *positive* (i.e., proficient in both warmth and competence), *ambivalent* (i.e., proficient in only competence), or *negative* (i.e., deficient in both warmth and competence) stereotype content before reporting their emotional responses to these portrayals at the intergroup level. Results of this experimental study further demonstrate the utility of integrating insights provided by SCM and intergroup contact theory in understanding the effects of exposure to media stereotypes.

Intergroup Contact and Affect

Intergroup contact scholars have identified anxiety, empathy, and trust and the key affective mediators of positive intergroup contact. Stephan and Stephan (1985) were among the first researchers responsible for redirecting scholarly attention from cognitive mechanisms to the role of affect in contact-prejudice association. Their model of *intergroup anxiety* posited that perceptions of intergroup threat play a key role in whether or not someone will engage in intergroup contact. Specifically, *intergroup anxiety* (i.e., feelings of discomfort associated with member of social outgroups) was found to stem from the anticipation of negative consequences of intergroup communication, including negative psychological consequences for the self (e.g., embarrassment, awkwardness, fear of offending), negative behavioral consequences for the self (e.g., exploitation, physical harm, verbal conflict), negative evaluations by outgroup members, and negative evaluations by ingroup members. Additionally, the valence of prior intergroup relations and other intergroup cognitions (e.g., stereotypes) are conceptualized as key antecedents of this unique form of anxiety. Thus, intergroup anxiety serves as a barrier to intergroup communication as individuals must navigate numerous hypothetical fears and biased cultural perceptions when deciding to engage in intergroup contact.

However, those who overcome these initial anxieties are often less fearful of intergroup contact in the future. Research inspired by Stephan and Stephan's (1985) work has repeatedly found that positive contact typically reduces perceptions of intergroup threat and subsequently anxiety (e.g., Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001; Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). Stated simply, people who experience positive intergroup contact are less likely feel anxious about similar interactions

with outgroup members in the future. To illustrate, a compelling laboratory study found that Whites who reported having regular contact with members of racial/ethnic minority groups showed lower levels of physiological and self-reported stress during intergroup contact scenarios than those who lacked these real world interactions (Blascovich et al., 2001). Thus, positive intergroup contact reduces prejudice at least partially because it lessens the anxieties people normally anticipate before entering into an intergroup encounter. In support of this notion, a meta-analysis of the contact literature found that anxiety had a stronger mediational effect on prejudice than outgroup knowledge (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). However, intergroup encounters that go awry (i.e., *negative* contact) may cause heightened levels of intergroup anxiety.

The same meta-analysis also identified *intergroup empathy* (i.e., the capacity to understand and share in the emotional states of social outgroup members) as a key emotional mediator between cross-group contact and prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Starting with work by Batson and colleagues (1997), scholars have argued that prolonged contact (especially via cross-group friendships) enables an individual to perspective take with members of social outgroups and empathize with their concerns. In theory, when an individual is able to perspective-take with members of a social outgroup, they should acquire more favorable intergroup attitudes. There is strong empirical support for this notion, with past work in this area demonstrating that positive intergroup contact involves an extension of the sense of self to include outgroup members (e.g., Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2001) and that perspective taking can foster more favorable racial attitudes (e.g., Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Thus, it appears that the benefits of intergroup contact (i.e., prejudice reduction) can be partially attributed to an increased capacity to share in the

emotions of outgroup members following a positive encounter.

As Turner, West, and Christie (2013) note, *outgroup trust* (i.e., positive expectation about the intentions/behavior of an outgroup toward the ingroup; Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998) has only recently been identified as a potential affective mediator of the positive intergroup contact (e.g., Tam et al., 2009). Research has demonstrated that trust can benefit intergroup relations in numerous ways, including enhanced cooperation, information sharing, as well as improved communication and problem solving (Hayashi, Ostrom, Walker, & Yamagishi, 1999). However, establishing trust between members of conflicting groups can be difficult, as trust must develop over time as a result of experiences that demonstrate an individual's behavior is both predictable and dependable (Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999). In other words, a person must demonstrate numerous truthful behaviors before being considered "trustworthy," whereas a single dishonest act is all that is needed to deem an individual "untrustworthy" (Rothbart & Park, 1986). Encouragingly, though, preliminary evidence exists demonstrating that positive intergroup contact can result in increased outgroup trust. In a study of contact between Catholic and Protestant university students in Ireland, Tam and colleagues (2009) found that desire for future contact was mediated by higher levels of outgroup trust following intergroup contact. Turner et al. (2013) found similar results in a study of imagined contact between British high school students and asylum seekers. Therefore, extant research suggests that positive intergroup contact increases levels of outgroup trust, which can subsequently improve intergroup relations.

Mediated Intergroup Contact and Affect. Despite the fact that mediating emotions have been extensively explored in the direct contact literature, the role of intergroup emotions in instances of mediated contact is understudied and therefore less clear (Park,

2012). In theory, mass media provide several affordances that could assist with reducing the anxiety typically associated with cross-group communication. Scholars have argued that there is low perceived risk associated with media consumption, which suggests that mediated contact may be less anxiety provoking than direct contact and may even amplify the benefits of extended contact. However, empirical support for this claim is mixed, as it is uncommon for researchers to directly measure anxiety in the nascent mediated contact literature (Park, 2012). Although Atwell Seate and Mastro (2017) discovered that news exposure indirectly influenced immigration attitudes through feelings of intergroup anxiety for heavy news consumers, Ortiz and Harwood (2007) found only limited support for their hypothesized effects of mediated contact on anxiety. Clearly, more work is needed in this area to better understand how media exposure to outgroup members can impact intergroup anxiety.

Although media scholars have focused considerable attention on trust in news media (e.g., Kohring & Matthes, 2007) and online credibility (e.g., Metzger, 2007), it is even less common for media contact studies to assess trust responses to outgroup characters. This may be a result of the fact that intergroup trust has only recently been identified as an affective mediator of positive contact. However, some work in advertising studies has found that trust is an important mediator of the effects of spokes-character features on brand attitude (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004), suggesting that trust in individual media characters can impact more general beliefs. In contrast, scholars of parasocial relationships with media characters have directly situated emotional empathy as one of the four major elements of parasocial identification (Cohen, 2001). Research in this area has generally supported the notion that mediated contact can induce empathy, as this emotion has been identified as a

core element entertainment media enjoyment (Zillmann, 1994). However, it is rare for researchers to measure empathic responses beyond a single character, leaving questions as to how media content may impact empathy at the intergroup level. Still, Park (2012) argues that "mediated contact is highly likely to generate empathy or sympathy of ingroup audiences toward outgroup characters, as long as the contact meets the conditions of optimal intergroup contact" (p. 150) before suggesting that "there remains a lot to learn" about affective influences on mediated intergroup contact (p. 155).

Summary. As this section has demonstrated, there is clear empirical support for the notion that anxiety, trust, and empathy work together to mediate the relationship between *direct* intergroup contact and prejudice. However, the role of these emotions in *mediated* contact is understudied (Park, 2012). In addition, scant attention has been placed on the specific features of communicators that can encourage or hinder these emotional responses beyond Allport's (1954) optimal conditions (e.g., equal status, shared goals, cooperative, etc.). In the next section, warmth and competence evaluations will be presented as potential mechanisms for predicting these important affective responses to social outgroup members.

Stereotype Content and Affect

Extending the stereotype content model (SCM, Fiske et al., 2002), Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2007) created the BIAS (Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes) map to explore how intergroup behaviors arise from stereotype content and the intergroup emotions associated with warmth and competence. With the SCM, Fiske et al. (2002) established that appraisals of the ingroup's well-being in relation to other social groups provoke affective reactions in a manner consistent with how appraisals of threats and benefits to the self evoke emotions (e.g., Smith, 1993). The emotions presented in the SCM and BIAS map are

believed to result from social comparisons made at the intergroup level related to a group's relative status and competitiveness (Fiske et al., 2002). The ingroup's appraisal of an outgroup's warmth and competence will result in either assimilative (i.e., self-evaluations are in line with the comparison target) or contrastive (i.e., self-evaluations are opposite the comparison target) judgments (Smith, 2000). Specifically, warmth and competence evaluations have been linked to feelings pity, envy, contempt, and admiration (Fiske et al., 2002). These affective reactions mediate certain discriminatory or facilitative behaviors (Cuddy et al., 2007).

Pity. The SCM predicts that the ambivalent stereotype content of low-status and noncompetitive groups (i.e., high warmth, low competence) should evoke feelings of superiority in the ingroup. Rooted in perceptions of competence deficiencies and low threat, these outgroup members are no believed to be responsible for their problems and evoke paternalistic responses. As *pity* (i.e., feelings of sorrow and compassion caused by the misfortunes of other) tends to be directed toward people facing adversity that is out of their control despite their best intentions (e.g., Weiner, 1985; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988), members of these groups are met with these downward assimilative social comparisons (Fiske et al., 2002).

Envy. In contrast, LW-HC groups are seen by the ingroup as being responsible for their elevated status over other social groups (due to high competence) and as being cold, potentially hostile competitors. Thus, the ingroup makes upward contrastive (i.e., competitive) comparisons toward members of these groups that stem from notions of injustice and inferiority. This ultimately results in feelings of envy (i.e., feelings of discontented or resentful longing; Parrot & Smith, 1993) toward members of LW-HC

groups.

Contempt. Members of LW-LC groups are seen as low-status freeloaders that use up social resources and redirect attention away from other potential societal priorities (Fiske et al., 2002). Deficiencies in both warmth and competence encourage the ingroup to view members of these highly stigmatized outgroups through a morally superior lens involving "overtones of injustice, indignation, and bitterness toward illegitimate behavior" (p. 896). Thus, the ingroup makes downward contrastive social comparisons that ultimately result in hostile feelings of contempt (i.e., the feeling that a person or group is worthless and beneath consideration).

Admiration. Not all social groups elicit such negative emotional reactions. Ingroup favoritism results in ingroup members, cultural reference groups, and close allies being perceived as highly proficient in both warmth and competence. People have positive, prideful reactions to the successes of close others as long as those successes do not detract from the self (Tesser, 1988). As ingroups are conceptualized as an extension of the self (e.g., Smith, 1993), members of HW-HC groups are expected to be met with feelings of admiration following these upward assimilative social comparisons (Smith, 2000).

Summary. Through analyses of correlational data, the mediating role of pity, envy, contempt, and admiration in the relationship between stereotype content and certain intergroup behaviors (i.e., active facilitation, active harm, passive facilitation, passive harm) is well supported empirically and across different cultures (e.g., Bye & Herrebrøden, 2017; Cuddy et al., 2007). However, it is uncommon for researchers to explore relationships between stereotype content and affect beyond pity, envy, empathy, and contempt (Bye & Herrebrøden, 2017). The current study seeks to expand the scope of SCM and BIAS map

research by integrating insights from the contact literature. While it is clear that stereotype content is related to certain prejudicial behaviors, warmth and competence evaluations have yet to be examined in the context of prejudice *reduction* via the affective mediators of positive contact. Although media messages containing social outgroups can evoke emotions (e.g., Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016; Ramasubramanian, 2010), there is only limited, mixed support concerning the media's influence on anxiety, empathy, and trust at the intergroup level. Study 2 addresses this shortcoming by linking warmth and competence evaluations of outgroup television characters to these affective mediators of intergroup contact.

The Present Study: Study 2

Study 2 explores if evaluations of a television character's stereotype content are predictive of intergroup anxiety, trust, and empathy. Figure 1 presents a model of the predicted influences of warmth and competence character evaluations in eliciting feelings of intergroup anxiety, trust, and empathy following mediated contact. SCM literature

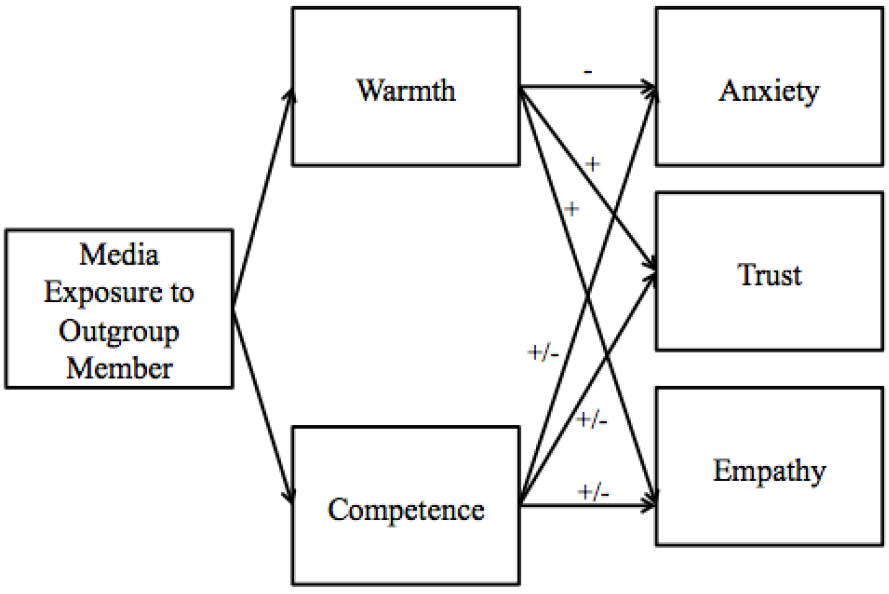

Figure 1. The proposed relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of a media character on the affective mediators of positive intergroup contact.

conceptualizes *warmth* as being indicative of a group's relative competiveness in intergroup contexts. Given that competitive intergroup contact is positively related to intergroup anxiety (Islam & Hewstone, 1993), it seems plausible that a character's warmth will be negatively related to this affective mediator of positive contact. Stated formally:

H1: Perceptions of an outgroup television character's warmth will be negatively related to feelings of intergroup anxiety.

Past research has also demonstrated that competitive victimhood (i.e., a belief in having suffered more than the outgroup) is negatively related to feelings of outgroup trust and empathy (Tam et al., 2009). As the SCM demonstrates, warmth is attributed to close ingroup members (HW-LC) or pitied outgroup members (HW-LC), and therefore it seems unlikely that an individual would feel inferior or more disadvantaged than the members of a social group they perceive as being warm. Therefore, it is expected that less competitive social groups will be easier to sympathize with and have faith in. Stated formally:

H2: Perceptions of a television character's warmth will be positively related to feelings of empathy toward that character.

H3: Perceptions of a television character's warmth will be positively related to feelings of trust toward that character.

Though Allport's (1954) optimal conditions of intergroup contact dictate that members of each social group should be of relatively equal status, the role of competence – or a group's relative status at the intergroup level – in eliciting intergroup anxiety is rather ambiguous. On one hand, it seems plausible that highly competent outgroups are more anxiety provoking due to their privileged position in the social status hierarchy. In support of

this notion, SCM literature has demonstrated that highly competent outgroups instill feelings of envy due to perceived inferiority (Cuddy et al., 2007). It seems likely that feeling inferior to an outgroup member would heighten levels of anxiety. However, highly competent ingroup members and close allies elicit feelings of pride and admiration (Fiske et al., 2002), suggesting low levels of anxiety could also be associated with high levels of competence. Given the contradictory emotional responses to competence provided by the SCM, Figure 1 offers no explicit predictions concerning the valence of the relationship between competence evaluations and intergroup anxiety (as denoted by +/- in the model):

RQ1: Will perceptions of an outgroup television character's competence be positively or negatively related to feelings of intergroup anxiety.

To further complicate matters, there are contradictory findings concerning an outgroup's relative status and their ability to evoke feelings of intergroup empathy. Cikara and Fiske (2011) found physiological indicators of schadenfreude after participants watched a high status stranger (i.e., an investment banker) sit in gum on a park bench. As the subjects exhibited more empathic responses when the target was of low status, it would appear that there is a negative relationship between perceptions of competence and feelings of empathy. However, distressed ingroup members (characterized again by high levels of perceived competence/status; Fiske et al., 2002) typically elicit high levels of empathy (Smith, Powell, Combs, & Schurtz, 2009)**,** suggesting a potentially positive relationship between competence and empathy for close allies. Therefore, the relationship between competence and intergroup empathy will also be explored with a research question:

RQ2: Will perceptions of an outgroup television character's competence be positively or negatively related to feelings of intergroup empathy?

Some preliminary evidence exists suggesting that there is a positive relationship between status and feelings of trust. Lount Jr. and Petit (2012) found that in the context of organizational life, people tend find high status individuals to be most trustworthy. Importantly, though, this relationship was mediated by perceptions of benevolence. Again, the SCM shows that highly competent groups are either trusted close allies (i.e., benevolent) or envied and competitive outgroup (i.e., non-benevolent). It then seems that competence could be positively or negatively related to feelings of intergroup trust depending on the group in question. Thus, the relationship between competence character evaluations and intergroup empathy will be explored with a research question:

RQ3: Will perceptions of an outgroup television character's competence be positively or negatively related to feelings of intergroup trust?

The six characters selected from the pilot testing (Study 1) to serve as stimuli in the present study were found to differ in terms of their stereotype content. Three of the characters were identified as having positive stereotype content (i.e., high warmth and competence) while the remaining 3 had either negative (i.e, deficiencies in both warmth and competence) or ambivalent (i.e., deficiencies in either warmth or competence) stereotype content. Therefore, it will be possible to draw comparisons between the intensity of intergroup emotions elicited by exposure to positive representations of sexual minorities with those elicited by less auspicious portrayals. This is a valuable endeavor given that the effectiveness of vicarious contact has been found to differ depending on the social group of interest (e.g., Harwood & Joyce, 2012). Stated formally:

RQ4: Will a sexual minority character's stereotype content (i.e., positive, negative, or ambivalent) influence emotional responses at the intergroup level?

Method: Study 2

The primary goal of study 2 was to explore how warmth and competence evaluations of the sexual minority character identified from the pilot testing (see Study 1) impact the affective mediators of positive intergroup contact. Specifically, participants (N = 260) were randomly assigned to one of six conditions (typical gay man/typical lesbian/positive transgender individual/typical gay man/atypical lesbian/negative transgender individual). After evaluating their assigned character on warmth and competence items, they were then asked questions related to *intergroup anxiety*, *intergroup empathy*, and *intergroup trust*.

Participants

A total of 260 undergraduate students at a large public university on the West Coast took part in the pilot study on a voluntary and anonymous basis. Students that took part in the pilot testing (study 1) were ineligible to participate in this project. The subjects were first asked to report basic demographic information. Given that SCM research is concerned with perceptions of social outgroups, students who identified as non-heterosexual (N = 22) or non-cisgender (N = 0) were removed from analyses, resulting in a final sample of 238 heterosexual and cisgender students (M age = 19.72, 73.4% female). The students were predominately White (40.9%) and Asian (27.8%), with the remainder self-identifying as Hispanic/Latino (14.8%), multiethnic/multiracial (12.7%), Black/African American (1.7%), "Other" (1.3%), and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.8%). All students received course credit for their participation and were debriefed on research goals following completion of the study.

Procedure

After signing up to participate in a study concerning perceptions of reality television show characters, subjects were sent a link to a digital questionnaire via Qualtrics. After accessing the link, the students were randomly assigned to view a clip of one of six characters from the pilot testing: *Survivor*'s Colton Cumbie (a stereotypical gay male of moderately low warmth and competence, i.e.,*negative* stereotype content; $N = 39$), *Finding Prince Charming*'s Robert Sepulveda Jr. (an atypical gay male of high warmth and high competence, i.e.,*positive* stereotype content; $N = 37$), *Big Brother*'s Kitten Pinder (a stereotypical lesbian of low warmth/high competence, i.e., *ambivalent* stereotype content; $N = 34$), *The Real L-Word*'s Tracy Ryerson (an atypical lesbian high in both warmth and competence, i.e., *positive* stereotype content; $N = 40$), *I Am Cait*'s Caitlyn Jenner (a transgender woman of low warmth, moderate competence, i.e.,*ambivalent* stereotype content; $N = 42$), or *I Am Jazz*'s Jazz Jennings (a transgender woman high in both warmth and competence, i.e.,*positive* stereotype content; $N = 45$). The clips were the same stimuli identified in the pilot testing (Study 1) and consisted of short clips of the characters introducing themselves directly to camera. To ensure the salience of outgroup identity, subjects were explicitly told that the clip they were about to view featured a gay man, lesbian woman, or transgender woman (depending on condition) and were given the following instructions: "Please pay close attention to the clip, as you will be asked to recall specific details later in the study. Pay particular attention to how you feel while watching this clip." After watching the clip, they responded to questions related to character evaluations and emotional responses.

Measures

Warmth and competence. The subjects were first asked to evaluate each character with the 8 items that were found to reliably assess warmth and competence in the pilot testing (see Study 1 results). For warmth, these items included *warm*, *kind*, *friendly*, and *likable*. For competence, these measures included *competent*, *skilled*, *intelligent*, and *capable*. All items were measured on 5-point Likert scales with 1 representing low levels of the attribute and 5 representing high levels of the variable of interest. These items were averaged to create composite scores for *warmth* (α =.95, M = 3.40, SD = 1.13) and *competence* (α =.94, M = 3.65, SD = .94).

Intergroup emotions. To measure the affective mediators of intergroup contact, subjects were asked to respond to scales used in the measurement anxiety, empathy, and trust at the intergroup level. All emotional responses were measured using 10-point Likert scales (1 = not at all, 10 = very much). *Intergroup anxiety* was assessed using items adapted from Stephan and Stephan (1985). Participants were instructed "If you were the only member of your group and you were interacting with a [gay/lesbian/transgender] person (e.g., talking with them, working on a project with them) similar to [character from clip], how would you feel compared to occasions when you are interacting only with people from your own group?" Subjects evaluated the imagined interaction on the following criteria: *certain*, *awkward*, *self-conscious*, *happy*, *accepted*, *confident*, *irritated*, *impatient*, *defensive*, *suspicious*, and *careful*. The certain, happy, accepted, and confident variables were reverse coded, and then the 11 items were averaged together to create a composite measure for *intergroup anxiety* (α = .88, M = 3.44, SD = 1.56).

Intergroup trust was assessed using measured adapted from Noor, Brown, and Prentice (2008). Participants were instructed to, "Think about [character name] and other [gay men/lesbian women/transgender women] that act similarly to [him/her]" before responding to the following items: [Gay men/lesbian women/transgender women] similar to [character name]: *seem fair*; *cannot be trusted*; *do not deliberately mislead*; *cannot be trusted to deliver on their promises*; *wish to exploit the vulnerability of my community*; *are mainly interested in looking for their own advantage*. Four items were reversed coded and scores were averaged to create a composite measure for intergroup trust ($\alpha = .80$, $M = 8.00$, $SD = 1.59$).

Finally, *intergroup empathy* was measured using items adapted from Vezzali, Giovannini, and Capozza (2010). Participants were again told to, "Think about [character name] and other [gay men/lesbian women/transgender women] that act similarly to [him/her]" before responding to the following items: I feel in tune with [character name] and [gay men/lesbian women/transgender women] that act similarly to [him/her]; I share the same emotions as [character name] and [gay men/lesbian women/transgender women] that act similarly to [him/her]; I understand the feelings of [character name] and [gay men/lesbian women/transgender women] that act similarly to [him/her]; I share the joys and sorrows of [character name] and [gay men/lesbian women/transgender women] that act similarly to [him/her]. The four items were averaged to create a composite measure for *intergroup empathy* ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 4.63$, $SD = 2.41$).

Results: Study 2

Manipulation Checks

To ensure that this sample evaluated the sexual minority characters' warmth and competence consistently with participants from the pilot study, descriptive statistics were analyzed. In the pilot study, the gay male characters of interest were evaluated as having negative stereotype content (i.e., moderately low warmth and competence) or positive stereotype content (high warmth and competence). Results of the second study revealed that students evaluated the typical (M_{warmth} = 2.76, $M_{competence}$ = 2.97) and atypical (M_{warmth} = 4.08, $M_{competence}$ = 4.18) gay male characters such that they landed in the same quadrants of the SCM as they did in the pilot study. As anticipated, independent sample t-test revealed that the atypical gay male character was significantly warmer [$t(74) = -7.22$, $p < .01$] and more competent [$t(73) = -6.41$, $p < .01$] than the highly typical character. Thus, participants in Study 2 evaluated the gay male characters consistently with those from the pilot study and in such a way that they aligned with the same distinct quadrants of the SCM as revealed in Study 1.

In Study 1, the lesbian characters of interest were evaluated as having either ambivalent stereotype content (i.e., low warmth and high competence) or positive stereotype content (i.e., high warmth and competence). Results of the second study revealed that students evaluated the typical (M_{warmth} = 2.54, $M_{competence}$ = 3.72) and atypical (M_{warmth} = 4.23, $M_{competence}$ = 3.87) lesbian characters such that they would be classified into the same quadrants of the SCM as they did in the pilot study. As expected, independent sample t-test revealed that the atypical lesbian character was significantly warmer [$t(72) = -9.77$, $p < .001$] than the typical character, and they did not significantly differ in terms of perceived

competence [$t(71) = -.72$, $p = .47$]. Again, the students the current study evaluated the lesbian characters consistently with those from the pilot study and in such a way that they landed in there expected respective quadrants of the SCM.

In the pilot study, the transgender female characters of interest were evaluated as having either ambivalent stereotype content (i.e., low warmth and moderately high competence) or positive stereotype content (i.e., high warmth and competence). Results of the second study revealed that students evaluated the negative ($M_{warmth} = 2.47$, $M_{competence} = 3.28$) and positive ($M_{warmth} = 4.11$, $M_{competence} = 3.92$) transgender characters such that they landed in the same quadrants of the SCM as they did in the pilot study. The positive transgender character was significantly warmer [$t(84) = -8.59$, $p = .001$] and more competent [$t(83) = -3.35$, $p = .001$] than the negative character. Thus, across all groups of interest, the sample from Study 2 evaluated the sexual minority characters consistently with those from the pilot study and in such a way that they landed in their expected quadrants of the SCM. Therefore, the manipulation checks were successful.

Path Analysis and Modeling

To test the predicted relationships between perceptions of television characters' warmth, competence, and the affective mediators of mediated intergroup contact, a series of 4 path analyses was conducted using MPlus version 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2000-2017). To examine general trends between stereotype content and intergroup affect, a path analysis was conducted with all data from all the sexual minority characters of interest. Then, 3 path analyses were conducted to examine differences for each group of interest (i.e., gay men, lesbian women, transgender women). Path analysis was chosen over structural equation modeling (SEM), as the major variables of interest were comprised of composite measures

and not treated as latent constructs. As with the pilot study, chi-square test of model fit, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) were used to determine the optimal structure and fit of the path models, and frequently used guidelines were used in the interpretations of these tests (i.e, Brown, 2015; Fabringer, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999; Hu & Bentler, 1999; see results from Chapter 3 for detailed guidelines). All models presented below had acceptable fit as determined by these criteria.

All sexual minority characters. The final sample size of sexual minority character evaluations after imputation was $N = 232$. The results of the path analysis with standardized regression coefficients for *intergroup anxiety*, *trust*, and *empathy* are presented in Figure 2. Results indicated that both *warmth* ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$) and *competence* ($\beta = -.24$, $p = .001$) perceptions had significant direct effects on feelings of *intergroup anxiety*. The negative valence of these relationships offer support for **H1** and suggest that competence is also negatively related to anxiety (**RQ1**). In contrast, significant positive relationships emerged between *warmth* ($\beta = .22$, $p = .001$), *competence* ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) and feelings of *intergroup trust*. These findings offer support for **H2** and suggest that competence is positively related to trust (**RQ2**). Similar relationships were found between character *warmth* ($\beta = .14$, $p = .05$), *competence* ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), and feelings of *intergroup empathy*. The positive valence of these paths offer support for **H3** and suggest that competence is also positively related to empathy (**RQ3**).

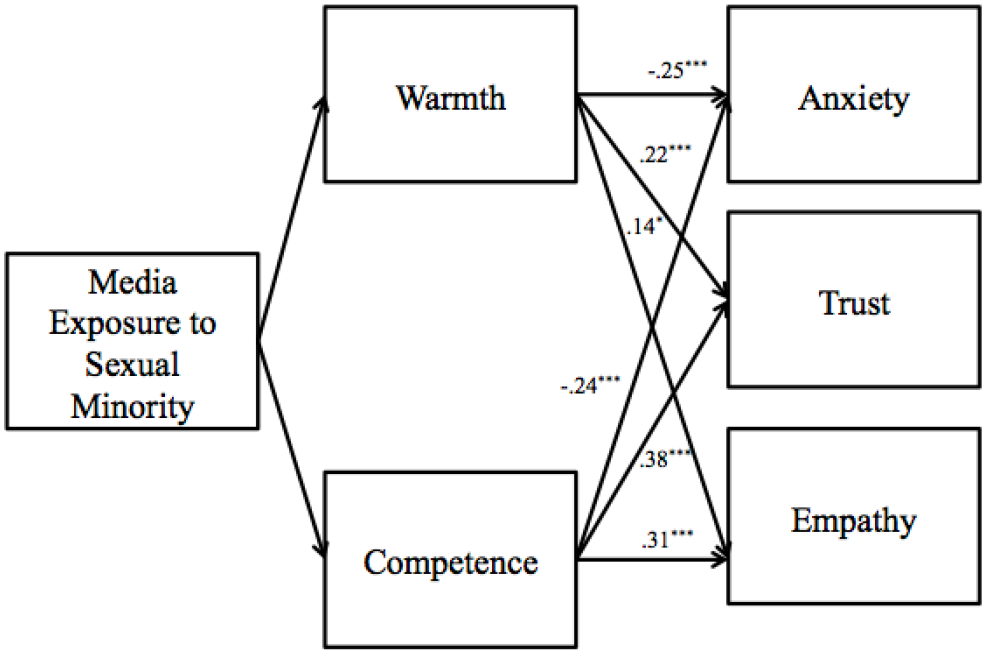

Figure 2. Path diagram depicting the influence of warmth and competence perceptions of sexual minority television characters ($N = 232$) on the affective mediators of intergroup contact. Significant paths ($p < .05$) are denoted by solid lines and an asterisk; non-significant effects are denoted by dashed lines.

Results indicated that both *warmth* ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$) and *competence* ($\beta = -.24$, $p = .001$) perceptions had significant direct effects on feelings of *intergroup anxiety*. The negative valence of these relationships offer support for **H1** and suggest that competence is also negatively related to anxiety (**RQ1**). In contrast, significant positive relationships emerged between *warmth* ($\beta = .22$, $p = .001$), *competence* ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) and feelings of *intergroup trust*. These findings offer support for **H2** and suggest that competence is positively related to trust (**RQ2**). Similar relationships were found between character *warmth* ($\beta = .14$, $p = .05$), *competence* ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), and feelings of *intergroup empathy*. The positive valence of these paths offer support for **H3** and suggest that competence is also positively related to empathy (**RQ3**).

Gay male characters. The final sample size of gay male character evaluations after imputation was $N = 75$. According to criteria established by Kline (1998), this sample meets the threshold for "adequate" sample size for path analysis (i.e., 10 times the number of parameters in the model). The results of the path analysis with standardized regression coefficients for *intergroup anxiety*, *trust*, and *empathy* are presented in Figure 3. Results indicated that for gay

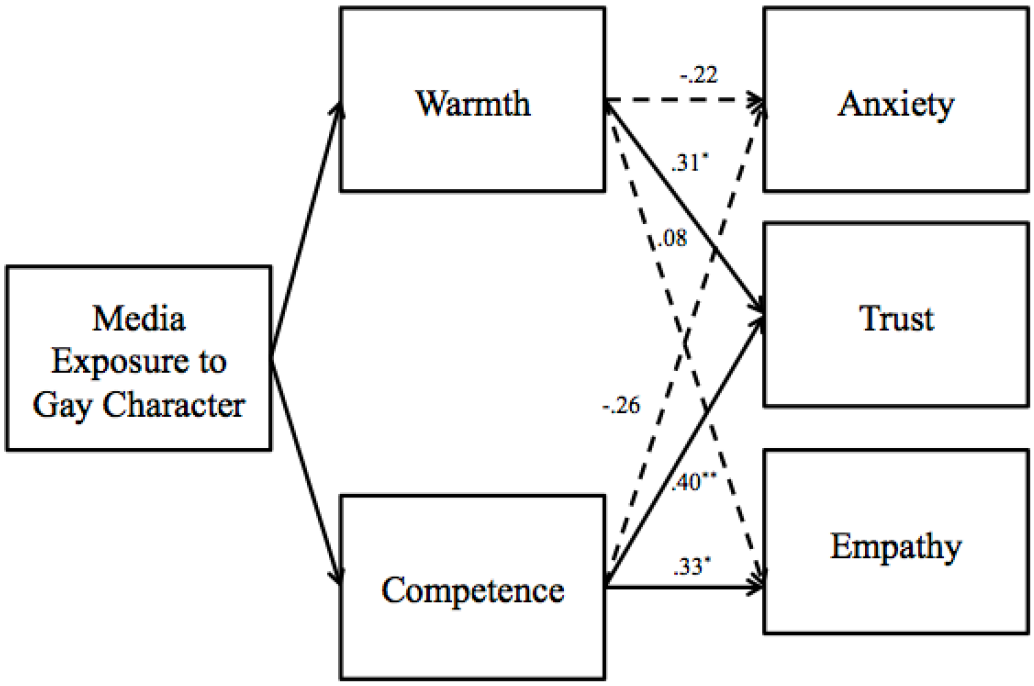

Figure 3. Path diagram depicting the influence of warmth and competence perceptions of gay male characters ($N = 75$) on the affective mediators of intergroup contact. Significant paths ($p < .05$) are denoted by solid lines and an asterisk; non-significant effects are denoted by dashed lines.

male characters, neither *warmth* ($\beta = -.22$, $p = .15$) nor *competence* ($\beta = -.26$, $p = .09$) significantly predicting feelings of *intergroup anxiety*. However, both *warmth* ($\beta = .31$, $p < .05$) and *competence* ($\beta = .40$, $p < .01$) were significant predictors of feelings of *intergroup trust*, offering further support for **H2** and the notion that competence is positively related to

trust (**RQ2**). Although character *warmth* (β = .16, p = .61) was not a significant predictor of *intergroup empathy*, a significant positive relationship emerged between *competence* (β = .33, p < .05) and empathy, offering further support for the notion that competence is positively related to empathy (**RQ3**).

Lesbian characters. The final sample size lesbian character evaluations after imputation was n = 73, again meeting Kline's (1998) criteria for adequate sample size in path modeling. The results of the path analysis with standardized regression coefficients for *intergroup anxiety*, *trust*, and *empathy* are presented in Figure 4. Results indicated that for lesbian characters, both *warmth*

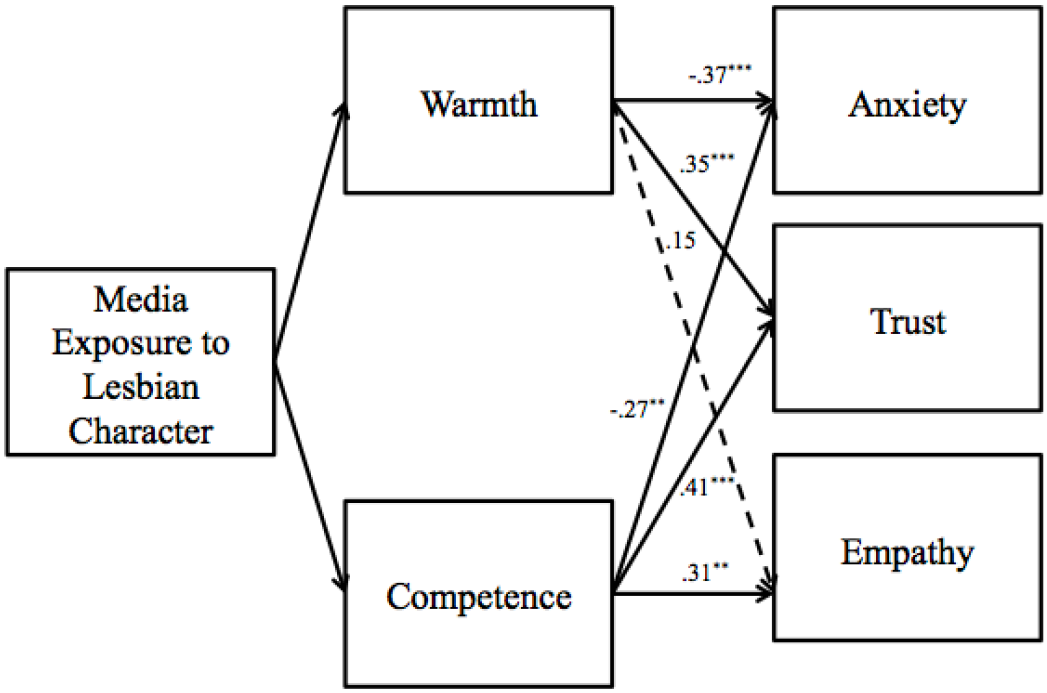

Figure 4. Path diagram depicting the influence of warmth and competence perceptions of lesbian characters (N = 73) on the affective mediators of intergroup contact. Significant paths (p < .05) are denoted by solid lines and an asterisk; non-significant effects are denoted by dashed lines.

(β = -.37, $p < .001$) and *competence* (β = -.27, $p < .05$) were negatively related to feelings of *intergroup anxiety*, offering further support for **H1** and further suggesting that competence character evaluations are negatively related to anxiety (**RQ1**). In addition, both *warmth* (β = .35, $p < .001$) and *competence* (β = .16, $p = .41$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of feelings of *intergroup trust*. The positive valence of these relationships offers further support for **H2** and offers additional evidence that competence character evaluations are positively related to trust (**RQ2**). While *competence* perceptions of lesbian characters (β = .31, $p < .01$) were predictive of feelings of *intergroup empathy*, no such relationship emerged for warmth evaluations (β = .15, $p = .21$). These findings offer further support to the notion that competence is positively related to feelings of empathy (**RQ3**).

Transgender female characters. The final sample size transgender female evaluations after imputation was n = 83, again meeting Kline's (1998) criteria for adequate sample size in path modeling. The results of the path analysis with standardized regression coefficients for *intergroup anxiety*, *trust*, and *empathy* are presented in Figure 5. Results indicated that for

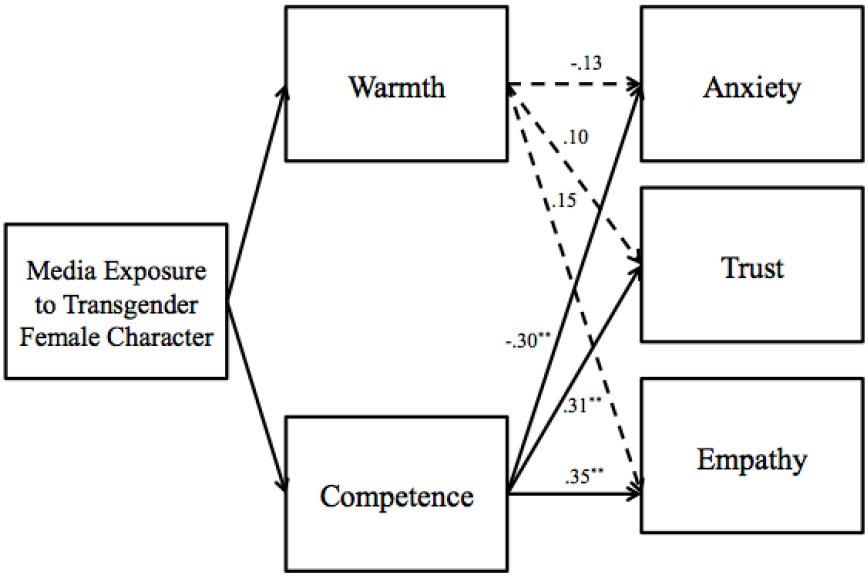

Figure 5. Path diagram depicting the influence of warmth and competence perceptions of transgender female characters (N = 83) on the affective mediators of intergroup contact. Significant paths ($p < .05$) are denoted by solid lines and an asterisk; non-significant effects are denoted by dashed lines.

transgender female characters, *warmth* was not a significant predictor of *intergroup anxiety* ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .27$), *trust* ($\beta = .10$, $p = .42$), or *empathy* ($\beta = .15$, $p = .19$). However, significant relationships emerged between *competence* evaluations and *intergroup anxiety* ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .01$), *intergroup trust* ($\beta = .31$, $p < .01$), and *intergroup empathy* ($\beta = .35$, $p < .01$), offering further support for the notion that competence character evaluations are negatively related to anxiety (**RQ1**), and positively related to feelings of intergroup trust (**RQ2**) and empathy (**RQ3**).

Differences in Emotional Responses to Stereotype Content of Sexual Minority Characters

To explore if a character's combined stereotype content (**RQ4**) influences the affective mediators of intergroup contact, a series of independent sample t-tests were conducted between the sexual minority characters of interest. First, comparisons were drawn between emotional responses to the characters with *positive stereotype content* (i.e., high warmth and competence) and those with *ambivalent* (i.e., high competence and low warmth) or *negative stereotype content* (i.e., moderately low warmth and competence). No significant differences emerged between responses to the two ambivalent characters and the single negative character, so they were combined to represent negative representations collectively. Results indicated that the participants felt significantly less anxious after exposure to the positive characters ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.54$) than the negative/ambivalent characters ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(231) = -2.54$, $p < .05$. In addition, the subjects were significantly more likely to trust the positive characters ($M = 8.38$, $SD = 1.38$) than the negative/ambivalent characters

(M = 7.58, SD = 1.69), $t(233) = 3.98$, $p < .001$. However, no significant differences emerged between the positive (M = 4.86, SD = 2.59) and negative/ambivalent (M = 4.39, SD = 2.19) characters in terms of intergroup empathy, $t(234) = 1.51$, $p = .14$. Thus, these results suggest that sexual minority characters that are proficient in both warmth and competence are less likely to evoke anxiety and more likely to foster feelings of trust than sexual minority characters who lack warmth and/or competence.

Next, comparisons were drawn between characters belonging to the *same* social groups using another series of independent sample t-tests. Results indicated that participants were better able to trust the atypical gay male character (M = 8.54, SD = 1.68) than the typical gay male character (M = 7.34, SD = 1.68), $t(73) = -6.63$, $p = .001$. However, no significant differences emerged between these characters in terms of empathy and anxiety responses at the intergroup level. For the lesbian characters, audience members felt significantly more anxiety after exposure to the typical character (M = 4.03, SD = 1.62) than after viewing the atypical character (M = 3.15, SD = 1.63), $t(72) = 2.34$, $p < .05$. Additionally, participants were better able to trust the atypical lesbian character (M = 8.50, SD = 1.41) than the typical lesbian character (M = 7.82, SD = 1.45), $t(72) = -2.03$, $p < .05$. No significant differences emerged between the lesbian characters in terms of intergroup empathy. For the transgender female characters, participants were better able to empathize with the positive representation (M = 5.08, SD = 2.48) than the ambivalent representation (M = 4.02, SD = 2.07), $t(83) = -2.17$, $p < .05$. However, no significant differences emerged between the transgender characters in terms of intergroup anxiety or trust.

Discussion: Study 2

By synthesizing insights offered by intergroup contact theory and the stereotype content model/BIAS map, this experimental study explored if warmth and competence evaluations of television characters were predictive of the affective mediators of positive intergroup context. When taken together, these results suggest that ratings of a character's stereotype content are related to feelings of anxiety, trust, and empathy in predictable and theoretically significant ways. From these results, measures of warmth and competence appear to be effective in assessing outgroup portrayal *quality* in terms of a character's potential to reduce prejudice via these specific intergroup emotions. In general, it appears that non-competitive and high status sexual minority characters have greater potential to reduce prejudice than characters of mixed or negative stereotype content. However, results were not uniform for all sexual minority characters. Some important group-based differences emerged in the stereotype content and intergroup affect associations depending whether an individual was exposed to a gay, lesbian, or transgender character. Additionally, in some cases the *intensity* of intergroup emotions felt following media exposure varied depending on a character's combined stereotype content (i.e., *positive* versus *ambivalent*/*negative*). Across all the groups of interest, competence was more often significantly related to the affective mediators than warmth. These findings deviate from past work that has demonstrated the primacy of warmth evaluations in terms of understanding outgroup *behavior* (Fiske et al., 2007). Instead, these results suggest that competence scores are more consistently predictive of intergroup *affect* with regard to media portrayals of sexual minorities.

Stereotype Content and Intergroup Anxiety

This study contributes to the small body of media research that has demonstrated the media's capacity to lessen anxieties related to social outgroups (e.g., Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2017; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Oftentimes stemming from biased cultural beliefs and irrational fears of the unknown, intergroup anxiety can be a major barrier to the improvement of intergroup relations. Mediated intergroup contact has considerable potential to lessen these outgroup fears, as consuming media content is a less arduous and scary process than potential face-to-face communication (Park, 2012). However, that the manner in which an outgroup member is represented in the media is a key factor in determining the valence of affective reactions.

Overall, sexual minority characters with positive stereotype content were significantly less anxiety inducing than those that fell into other quadrants of the SCM. As results presented in Figure 2 demonstrate, warmth and competence are negatively related to intergroup anxiety. When gay men, lesbian women, and transgender women are represented in a manner that is consistent with the culturally dominant reference groups (e.g., the middle class, Whites, Christians), they have impressive potential to reduce feeling of intergroup anxiety. In contrast, when a sexual minority character deviates from the ingroup in terms of stereotype content (i.e., cold and/or competitive), exposure to that characterization may actually amplify outgroup fears. Importantly though, the relationships between perceived stereotype content and anxiety were not uniform for each of the three sexual minority groups under examination. The lesbian characters constituted the only group for which *both* warmth and competence were predictors of intergroup anxiety while warmth evaluations of gay and transgender characters were unrelated to these emotions. Thus, it would appear that the use

of SCM measures in predicting outgroup anxiety might be more appropriate for some groups than others. Stephan and Renfro (2002) found that levels of intergroup anxiety are related to expectations of physical danger as well as expectations of identity-related damage (i.e., symbolic threat). Perhaps combining SCM variables with items related to the type of threat that outgroups pose would result in clearer findings. Further work is needed across a wider range of target groups to address the potential shortcomings of this SCM/mediated contact theoretical approach.

There are several other potential explanations for these group-based differences, many of which stem from the large proportion of female students that made up the sample for this study. There are important gender-based differences in prejudice related to sexual minorities (e.g., LaMar & Kite, 1998). Some heterosexual men fear unwanted sexual advances from gay men (Dressler, 1994). In addition, male perpetrators often commit violence toward transgender women after feeling "tricked" upon the discovery of a sexual partner's gender identity (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). These sexual threats are unlikely to be salient or anxiety provoking for heterosexual women. Thus, past research supports the notion that gay men and transgender women are less threatening social groups for women than men. This potentially explains why measures of intergroup competition (i.e, warmth) were statistically unrelated to intergroup anxiety for gay and transgender characters. However, as lesbian women constitute a viable sexual threat for some prejudiced heterosexual women (e.g., Simmons, 1979), it makes sense that *both* warmth and competence were related to anxiety in this sample. Furthermore, the lesbian characters were the only group for which the *ambivalent*/*negative* character provoked significantly more intergroup anxiety than the *positive* character. Still, findings that combined characters from

all three groups illustrate the potential for competent, intelligent, skilled, and capable media portrayals of sexual minorities to reduce intergroup anxiety.

Stereotype Content and Intergroup Empathy

Intergroup contact is believed to enhance an individual's capacity to perspective take and experience the emotions of outgroup members. Past research on parasocial relationships with media characters has identified empathy as one of the four major elements of parasocial identification (Cohen, 2001), and documented how feeling empathy for specific characters can enhance overall media enjoyment (Zillmann, 1994). Although this study is among the first to measure empathic responses to media characters at the *intergroup* level, the results do not suggest that combined stereotype content is an effective predictor of this emotion. Across groups, the subjects found the sexual minority characters of positive stereotype content no easier to empathize with than the characters with ambivalent or negative stereotype content. Additionally, the transgender women were the only set of positive and ambivalent characters to evoke significantly different levels of intergroup empathy. These mixed findings ultimately suggest that competence evaluations alone are indicative of a sexual minority outgoup character's potential to foster intergroup empathy and subsequently reduce prejudice.

As the path analyses presented in Figure 2 demonstrate, warmth evaluations of *all* sexual minority characters were positively related to feelings of intergroup empathy. Interestingly though, when analyses were broken down by individual social groups (Figures 3-5), the paths between warmth evaluations of gay, lesbian, and transgender characters and intergroup empathy became non-significant. Because each model met Kline's (1998) criteria for adequate sample size, it would appear that warmth evaluations do not reliably predict

intergroup empathy. Therefore, it appears that measures of intergroup threat are less relevant to empathic responses to sexual minority character than measures of status. With these anomalous results in mind, the significant path between warmth and empathy in Figure 2 should be interpreted with caution, as its significance may simply be a product of the large number of characters imputed into the model.

The role of competence in generating intergroup empathy is much less ambiguous, as appraisals of a character's relative status positively predicted this emotional response across all three social groups of interest. Given that university students are immersed in a high-pressure academic environment focused on developing intellect and cognitive skills, a character's competence may have been more indicative of this sample's ability to empathize with him or her. Regardless of the social group in question, audiences appear most able to empathize with highly competent characterizations of outgroup members.

Stereotype Content and Intergroup Trust

As trust has only recently been identified as an affective mediator to the contact-prejudice association, it is uncommon for studies of mediated contact to assess the potential for characters to evoke these feelings at the intergroup level. Thus, the findings offered by this experiment are among the first to demonstrate that non-competitive and high status media characters are considered to be trustworthy by audience members. Overall, sexual minority characters of positive stereotype content were easier to trust than those with negative or ambivalent stereotype content. The generally positive relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of sexual minority television characters and intergroup trust (Figure 2) are consistent with past work that has established high status and benevolent individuals are easier to trust (Lount Jr. & Petit, 2012).

Still, some between-group differences did emerge. While *both* warmth and competence were significant predictors of intergroup trust for the gay and lesbian characters, *only* competence evaluations mattered for the transgender women. This was also the only pair of characters for which the positive and ambivalent/negative characters were perceived as being equally trustworthy. This may be explained by that fact that in the United States, transgender visibility and acceptance continues to lag behind that of gays and lesbians. Although nearly nine-in-ten U.S. adults (87%) say they know someone who is gay or lesbian, far fewer (40%) report they know someone who is transgender (Pew Research Center, 2017). As trust is an emotional state that is established over time (Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999), it may be the case that warmth evaluations of transgender characters were less predictive of trust because of general unfamiliarity with norms for members of this group. This could also explain why neither character was seen as being highly typical or atypical in the pilot study (Study 1). Still, when taken together these results suggest that there are potential social benefits to presenting sexual minority characters as both warm and competent.

Conclusion

This experimental study offers compelling preliminary evidence that stereotype content evaluations are predictive of emotional responses to outgroup media characters at the intergroup level. Competence evaluations, or perceptions of an outgroup character's relative status, were especially effective in assessing a character's potential to evoke feelings of trust, empathy, and lessen anxiety. In contrast, warmth, or a character's perceived threat, was unrelated to feelings of intergroup empathy. These evaluations were ineffective in differentiating transgender female characters on all of the affective mediators of interest.

Again, while past work has demonstrated that warmth trumps competence in terms of understanding the behaviors of outgroup members (Fiske et al., 2007), a group's relative status seems to more closely related to the feelings that sexual minority characters can evoke at the intergroup level. Though other group-based differences also emerged, these findings suggest that sexual minority characters that are high in both warmth and competence have greater potential to reduce prejudice than characters of mixed or negative stereotype content. This assumption will be tested in Study 3, a longitudinal experiment that will examine outgroup attitude change following exposure to these characters.

Chapter 5: Stereotype Change and Prejudice Reduction Following Mediated Contact with Sexual Minorities of Varying Stereotype Content (Study 3)

The first two studies examined how warmth and competence perceptions of sexual minority television characters are related to the optimal conditions and affective mediators of mediated intergroup contact. The results of these investigations offer preliminary evidence that perceptions of a character's stereotype content are related to evaluations of *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity*. Further, these character attributes (especially competence) are predictive of feelings of anxiety, trust, and empathy at the intergroup level. Given that these cognitive and affective factors are known to influence the contact-prejudice association articulated in intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), the current study seeks to document how exposure to sexual minority characters of differing stereotype content (positive versus negative/ambivalent) influences attitudes and beliefs about the outgroup in general. Following the *impression formation paradigm* (Garcia-Marques & Mackie, 2001), this longitudinal experimental study explores whether warmth and competence evaluations of a single character generalize to perceptions of the stereotype content of *all* gay men, lesbian women, and transgender women. Additionally, the results of this study speak to the relative potential for these characters to reduce (or increase) levels of prejudice, thereby demonstrating the utility of warmth and competence metrics in predicting the valence of mediated intergroup contact.

The Generalizability of Intergroup Contact

A key tenant of contact theory is that the outcomes of cross-group interactions are not limited to the individual participants involved in intergroup communication. In essence, when people engage in intergroup contact, they serve as representatives (i.e., *exemplars*) for the norms of their respective social groups. Thus, the cognitions and emotions they evoke

can have considerable influence on broader group-level attitudes and beliefs. While the bulk of research using contact theory is concerned specifically with prejudice reduction, some scholarship in this area has instead focused on how intergroup contact may influence preexisting stereotypes.

*Individual-to-group generalization*s are an outcome of intergroup contact wherein information about individual members of a social group can either positively or negatively affect judgments about the outgroup as a whole (Paolini, Hewstone, Rubin, & Pay, 2004). This phenomenon is believed to influence processes of stereotype maintenance in instances where an outgroup member does not adhere to pervasive cultural stereotypes (e.g., Paolini, Crisp, & McIntyre, 2009). Recent meta-analytic work has found support for a *basic generalization hypothesis* - or the notion that information about an individual group member is readily incorporated into group-level judgments (McIntyre et al., 2016). With the advent of social media and marginal increases in the representation of certain minority groups across mass media outlets, researchers are more commonly examining ways in which vicarious contact with outgroup members can facilitate stereotype change. Findings supporting the basic generalization hypothesis are relatively consistent across a variety of social groups (e.g., occupational groups, racial/ethnic groups, student groups), even when outgroup information is presented through different media (i.e., written, audio, or video stimuli; McIntyre et al., 2016).

Researchers typically adopt the *impression formation paradigm* (Garcia-Marques & Mackie, 2001) in empirical examinations of individual-to-group generalization. In this paradigm, subjects are presented with information describing specific qualities, traits, attributes, or behaviors of specific outgroup members. Depending on the goals of the

project, this information could be stereotype confirming or disconfirming in nature. The participants are asked to form an impression about the outgroup exemplar (or exemplars) before expressing judgments about the social group as a whole. Generalization effects are assessed with repeated measure designs that either (a) measure general outgroup evaluations before and after exposure to an exemplar (e.g., Cameron & Rutland, 2006) or (b) compare differences in judgments between experimental (i.e., stereotype disconfirming) and control (i.e., stereotype confirming or no-information) conditions (e.g., Stratton, Canales, Armas, & Miller, 2006).

There is some debate concerning *how* individual-to-group generalization occurs. Classic stereotyping theories including the bookkeeping model, the conversion model, and the subtyping/prototype model offer conflicting views regarding the optimal quantity and quality of outgroup information necessary to maximize positive generalization effects (Weber & Crocker, 1983). The bookkeeping model posits that group stereotypes are changed incrementally, such that any single piece of stereotype disconfirming evidence is generalized and elicits a minor change in overall beliefs about the group (Rothbart, 1981). This approach essentially argues that exposure to larger samples of counter-stereotypical outgroup portrayals should increase the magnitude of stereotype change (i.e., generalization).

Focusing instead on levels of *outgroup typicality* (i.e., exemplar quality), the conversion model (Rothbart, 1981) predicts that exposure to *extremely* stereotype-disconfirming outgroup members will facilitate the strongest generalization effects. In contrast, the subtyping/prototype model (Hewstone, 1994) argues that *moderately* atypical prototypes offer the greatest generalization potential, as extremely counter-stereotypical

outgroup members might encourage individuals to create new subgroups instead of changing the broader stereotype. McIntyre and colleagues (2016) found meta-analytic support across 107 experimental studies for the notion that exposure to a large (versus small) number of moderately (versus extremely) atypical exemplars best facilitates positive individual-to-group generalization. Therefore, this body of research suggests that exposure to several *moderately atypical* representations of outgroup members is an effective strategy for changing outgroup stereotypes.

Yet some questions remain concerning how the typicality of an outgroup exemplar is best determined. Based on the research included in a recent meta-analysis (McIntyre et al., 2016), typicality is sometimes assigned to outgroup exemplars without much - if any - explication (e.g., Bless, Schwarz, Bodenhousen, & Thiel, 2001; Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Greenwood & Christian, 2008). This may be because stereotypes are - by definition - widely held cultural beliefs, and therefore some researches may not believe they require rigorous explanation. In other cases, stereotypical traits are established through pilot testing that asks participants to list certain features they associate with particular social groups. Based on these findings, an exemplar's typicality is determined by the extent to which it subscribes to or deviates from these group-specific attributes (e.g., Huici et al., 1996; Park, Ryan, & Judd, 1992; Seta, Seta, & McElroy, 2003). This reliance on metrics of group-specific stereotypes makes drawing comparisons between the effectiveness of generalization studies that involve members of different social groups difficult, as certain stereotypes are more strongly held - and therefore difficult to change - due to chronic exposure (Brewer & Lui, 1989). When considering that effect sizes in studies of intergroup contact vary between certain target

groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), there may be a need to incorporate more universal measures of stereotypes into this domain.

The Valence of Intergroup Contact

In an impressive meta-analysis of the intergroup contact literature consisting of 515 studies and 713 independent samples, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) note that contact research has generally ignored instances of *negative* intergroup contact, or intergroup communication that results in *increased* prejudice. As interactions meeting all of Allport's (1954) criteria can be highly unlikely in certain naturalistic settings (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005), some researchers have argued that insights gained from the contact literature are limited in terms of their applicability to real world (i.e., non-laboratory) situations (e.g., Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014). As people are likely to experience positive, negative, and neutral intergroup contact throughout their everyday lives (Stark, Flache, & Veenstra, 2013), questions remain concerning the relative impact of negative versus positive contact experiences on prejudicial attitudes and beliefs.

In response to these limitations, a growing body of research has specifically examined instances of negative intergroup contact. Many of these studies directly compare the relative influence of positive and negative intergroup contact on prejudicial attitudes in laboratory settings. Early work in this area found that group memberships are more salient during negative intergroup experiences (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010), and that this increased social category-awareness causes the effects of negative contact to more readily generalize to the outgroup as a whole (Barlow et al., 2012; Paolini et al., 2010). Although some studies have suggested that the prejudice-increasing effects of negative contact outweigh the prejudice-reducing benefits of positive contact (e.g., Barlow et al., 2012;

Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009), others have demonstrated that these experiences generalize to the outgroup to the same degree (Paolini, McIntyre, & Hewstone, 2015; Stark et al., 2013) or that positive experiences overpower negative ones (Pettigrew, 2008). Thus, whereas some evidence exists that negative intergroup experiences are most influential on group-level judgments, more work is needed in this area before definitive claims can be made.

Other work in this domain has explored the relative frequency of positive versus negative contact experiences with regard to people's everyday experiences. In general, these studies have suggested that instances of positive intergroup contact outnumber those of negative contact in naturalistic settings (Barlow et al., 2012; Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). However, some critics have raised concerns about the validity and accuracy of the recollection-based measures used in this work that force subjects to retroactively code the valence of past cross-group encounters (e.g., Graf et al., 2014). Still, some have found this work compelling enough to conclude that the prevalence of positive contact experiences should balance out the stronger influence of less commonly occurring negative contact. Graf, Paolini, and Rubin (2014) found correlational evidence for overall net improvements in outgroup attitudes following both positive and (less frequently occurring) negative contact experiences in an examination of 1,276 European students across 5 countries. Thus, although negative contact is believed to be more influential on outgroup attitudes, recent research suggests that more commonly occurring positive experiences may negate these potentially deleterious outcomes.

This increased attention toward negative contact has broadened the scope of contact theory by demonstrating that intergroup experiences are not inherently beneficial. However, there are some important limitations to this modest but growing collection of work.

Research on direct and mediated intergroup contact has failed to specify the content and character attributes that may best facilitate positive outcomes (see Chapter 1). Indeed, scholars have noted that the specific features of intergroup communicators are often ignored beyond Allport's (1954) optimal conditions, unmeasured, or only discussed vaguely in terms of theoretical implications (Harwood & Joyce, 2012). This same issue is true of research on negative intergroup contact. While it is important to identify the features of people and media portrayals that have the greatest potential to improve outgroup perceptions, it may be even more consequential to document characteristics of communicators that ultimately harm intergroup relations. These issues are particularly relevant to research on mediated contact, as the quality of representations of minorities in mass media is frequently criticized (see Chapters 1 and 2).

The Current Study: Study 3

As discussed previously, the stereotype content model (SCM; Fiske et al., 2002) is a theoretical framework that provides standardized metrics for the universal dimensions of stereotypes. As assessments of stereotype content often serve solely descriptive purposes (e.g., documenting predominant cultural beliefs about social groups; Cuddy et al., 2009; Lin, Kwan, Cheung, & Fiske, 2005), it is less common for researchers to use warmth and competence when evaluating *changes* in attitudes and beliefs following exposure to an outgroup member. Instead, as McIntyre and colleagues (2016) note, the metrics used to gauge these generalization effects vary between group-specific stereotype scales (e.g., Bless et al., 2001; Cernat, 2011; Duval, Ruscher, Welsh, & Cantanese, 2000), assessments of outgroup variability (e.g., Paolini et al., 2004), and measures of group-specific prejudice (e.g., Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001). However, there are

benefits to situating components of the SCM within individual-to-group generalization research.

Incorporating measures of stereotype content can potentially broaden the scope of this work, which generally relies on measures of group-specific stereotypes to establish a prototype's level of typicality. As stereotype content variables are universal, researchers interested in stereotype generalization can adopt this approach when studying differences in responses to a wider range of target groups. A more standardized approach to measuring generalization effects would also allow for clearer comparisons to be drawn between the results of studies that target different social groups. This is especially important when considering that the effectiveness of contact interventions has been found to vary depending on the target group in question. From an SCM perspective, this variability could be explained by exploring which quadrant an outgroup exemplar is classified within the theoretical model.

In addition, SCM variables are predictive of information related to the quality of an outgroup prototype. As evidenced by results from Study 1, measures of warmth and competence can effectively predict the perceived typicality of certain sexual minorities (i.e., gay men and lesbians). Again, the extent to which an individual deviates from his or her group's placement in the SCM (as established in past research) can be used to establish levels of typicality. As these perceptions of outgroup typicality are inherent to several classic models of stereotype maintenance (e.g., Weber & Crocker, 1983), integrating insights offered by the SCM with individual-to-group generalization research may inform what types of exemplars can most effectively combat harmful stereotypes based on the

extent to which they adhere to or deviate from their group's overarching placement in the model.

Given that exposure to a stereotype confirming or disconfirming outgroup member can either reinforce or weaken stereotypes, it seems likely that the exposure to characters (i.e., exemplars) of different stereotype content could promote different outcomes in terms of perceptions of the outgroup as a whole. Atypical/positive sexual minority characters – marked by high levels of both warmth and competence – have the potential to improve outgroup perceptions to be more in line with ingroup members and close allies. When considering the basic generalization hypothesis, a sexual minority character with positive stereotype content could potentially improve the deficiencies in warmth and/or competence associated with his or her group. In contrast, more stereotypical/negative representations (i.e., those of negative or ambivalent stereotype content) could reinforce perceived differences from the ingroup in terms of lacking warmth and/or competence. Stated formally:

H1: Warmth and competence evaluations (i.e., stereotype content) of a *specific* sexual minority character will generalize to perception of *all* members of that group such that:

(a) Exposure to a character of positive stereotype content (i.e., HW-HC) will result in perceiving *all* members of that social group as being warmer and more competent.

(b) Exposure to a character of negative stereotype content (i.e., LW-LC) will result in perceiving *all* members of that social group as being less warm and less competent.

(c) Exposure to a character of ambivalent stereotype content (i.e., LW-LC) will result in perceiving *all* members of that social group as being less warm and more competent.

However, as discussed in previously, meta-analytic work indicates that the benefits of intergroup contact are primarily a result of changes in the emotions felt toward outgroup members as opposed to cognitive responses like stereotype generalization. As demonstrated in Study 2, competence and - to a lesser extent - warmth evaluations of sexual minority characters were related to the affective mediators of intergroup contact. Therefore, these variables could assist in predicting the overall valence of mediated contact. As research on both positive and negative intergroup contact often overlooks the specific features of intergroup communicators beyond Allport's (1954) optimal conditions, this integration of SCM with contact theory is of both theoretical and practical interest.

Though some group-based differences emerged in the results from Study 2between the three sexual minority groups of interest, warmth and competence evaluations tended to be positively related to feelings of trust and empathy, but negatively related to levels of intergroup anxiety. When positive intergroup contact lessens outgroup fears while fostering trust and empathy, levels of prejudice usually decline. In situations marked by the opposite affective responses, prejudice may actually increase. Thus, it seems probable that sexual minority media exemplars characterized by high levels of warmth and competences are more capable of reducing prejudice (i.e., facilitating positive contact) while exposure to those with deficiencies in these attributes could actually increase outgroup antipathy (i.e., facilitate negative contact), as mediated by these affective responses. Stated formally:

H2: Mediated contact with a sexual minority character of positive stereotype content (HW-HC) will result in greater prejudice reduction than mediated contact with a sexual minority character of negative (LW-LC) stereotype content.

H3: Mediated contact with a sexual minority character of positive stereotype content (HW-HC) will result in greater prejudice reduction than mediated contact with a sexual minority character of ambivalent (LW-HC) stereotype content.

H4: Levels of intergroup anxiety will be higher whereas levels of trust and empathy will lower for individuals exposed to a negative/ambivalent portrayal of sexual minorities when compared to those exposed to a portrayal with positive stereotype content.

Method: Study 3

In this longitudinal experiment, participants ($N = 200$) were again randomly assigned to one of six conditions (positive gay man/positive lesbian/positive transgender woman/negative gay man/ambivalent lesbian/ambivalent transgender woman) identified in Study 1 and employed in Study 2. In the first phase of this study, participants responded to items related to their media consumption habits, attitudes and beliefs concerning various social groups, and prejudice held toward gay men, lesbian women, or transgender individuals. Several days later, they were sent a link to a second questionnaire that contained their assigned media stimuli. After evaluating the assigned character on warmth and competence items as well as their emotional responses to the character, they again reported their prejudicial beliefs toward sexual minorities in general. Following the impression-formation paradigm (Garcia-Marques & Mackie, 2001), the longitudinal nature of this study allows for the assessment of attitude change following exposure to the characters of interest and speaks the potential for the effects of mediated intergroup contact to generalize beyond a specific character to each social group of interest.

Participants

A total of 200 undergraduate students at a large public university on the West Coast took part in this study on a voluntary and anonymous basis. Students that took part in the pilot testing (Study 1) or Study 2 were ineligible to participate in this project. The subjects were first asked to report basic demographic information. Given that SCM research is concerned with perceptions of social outgroups, students who identified as non-heterosexual ($N = 18$) or non-cisgender ($N = 0$) were removed from analyses, resulting in a final sample of 188 heterosexual and cisgender students (M age = 19.79, 83% female). The students were predominately White (38.8%) and Asian (32.4%), with the remainder self-identifying as Hispanic/Latino (11.2%), multiethnic/multiracial (11.7%), Black/African American (2.1%), "Other" (1.6%), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1.6%), and Native American/American Indian (0.5%). All students received course credit for their participation and were debriefed on research goals following completion of the study.

Procedure

After signing up to participate in a study concerning media habits and perceptions of reality television characters, the subjects were sent a link to a digital questionnaire via Qualtrics. Students were randomly assigned to one of three conditions that corresponded to the social group that they would be asked questions about: gay men, lesbian women, or transgender women. Participants were asked to report beliefs about various social groups (including their assigned sexual minority group) as well as prejudice held toward sexual minorities in general. Five days following the completion of the first phase of the study, participants were emailed a link to a second Qualtrics questionnaire. After accessing the second link, participants were randomly assigned to view clips featuring a character of either

positive or negative/ambivalent stereotype content from their previously assigned social group: *Survivor*'s Colton Cumbie (a gay male of *negative* stereotype content; $N = 28$), *Finding Prince Charming*'s Robert Sepulveda Jr. (a gay male of *positive* stereotype content; $N = 31$), *Big Brother*'s Kitten Pinder (a lesbian of *ambivalent* stereotype content; $N = 32$), *The Real L-Word*'s Tracy Ryerson (a lesbian of *positive* stereotype content; $N = 31$), *I Am Cait*'s Caitlyn Jenner (a transgender woman of *ambivalent* stereotype content; $N = 36$), or *I Am Jazz*'s Jazz Jennings (a transgender woman of *positive* stereotype content; $N = 30$). The clips were the same stimuli used in the pilot testing (Study 1) and Study 2.

To ensure the salience of outgroup identity, subjects were again explicitly told that the clip they were about to view featured a gay man, lesbian woman, or transgender woman (depending on condition) and were given the following instructions: "Please pay close attention to the clip, as you will be asked to recall specific details later in the study. Pay particular attention to how you feel while watching this clip." After watching the clip, they responded to questions related to character evaluations, emotional responses, and completed items from the same sexual minority prejudice scale used in the first phase.

Measures

Stereotype content of sexual minorities. To assess cultural stereotypes held toward sexual minorities *in general*, students were asked to evaluate members of three social groups on measures of stereotype content (adapted from Fiske et al., 2002) in the first questionnaire (phase 1). Participants were instructed to "Think about how most Americans view [social group] when answering the following questions. To what extent do most Americans view members of this group as..." before responding to indicators of warmth and competence with regard to African Americans, Muslims, and gay men, lesbian women, or transgender women

(depending on condition). Data related to perceptions of African Americans and Muslims were collected to conceal this study's focus on sexual minorities, and were not analyzed. The indicators of warmth (i.e., *warm*, *kind*, *friendly*, *likable*) and *competence* (i.e., *competent*, *skilled*, *intelligent*, *capable*) were the same items found to reliably assess these characters in the pilot testing (see Study 1 results) and measured using 5-point Likert scales (1 = not at all, 5 = very much). These items were averaged together to create composite scores for *warmth* (α = .94; M = 3.19, SD = .97) and *competence* (α = .94; M = 3.09, SD = .88). To assess *changes* in perceived stereotype content of sexual minorities after mediated contact, these same questions were also presented following exposure to the assigned character in the second questionnaire (phase 2).

Real world and mediated contact with sexual minorities. Using 5-point Likert scales (1 = none at all, 5 = a great deal), participants were asked to quantify the degree to which they have contact with members of various social groups in their everyday lives, including African Americans, Muslims, and either gay men, lesbian women, or transgender women (depending on condition). To assess real world contact, participants rated the extent to which they interacted with members of these groups *as close friends* (M = 2.22, SD = 1.44), as cross-group friendships are known to be especially effective in reducing prejudice. To assess mediated contact, subjects rated the extent to which they have contact with members of the group of interest *on television* (M = 2.83, SD = 1.17). Again, responses related to contact with African Americans and Muslims were only collected in an effort to conceal this study's focus on sexual minorities, and were not used in data analyses. These questions were only included in the first questionnaire (phase 1).

Prejudice toward sexual minorities. To assess participants' prejudicial attitudes and beliefs with regard to gay men, lesbian women, or transgender women, they responded to items adapted from Morrison and Morrison's (2003) Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS). The MHS is a 12-item scale, which assesses prejudice on variety of dimensions and modern social concerns, including public policy decisions (e.g., "Gay men still need to protest for equal rights"), social issues (e.g., "Many gay men use their sexual orientation so that they can obtain special privileges"), and economic considerations (e.g., "In today's tough economic times, tax dollars shouldn't be used to support gay men's organizations").

Participants reported their agreement to the 12 statements using 5-point Likert items (1 = do not agree at all, 5 = strongly agree), which were averaged to create composite measures for prejudice held toward sexual minorities ($\alpha = .81$; $M = 2.58$, $SD = .99$). The wording of each question was adjusted such that the statements only referenced gay men, lesbian women, or transgender women (i.e., "The notion of universities providing students with undergraduate degrees in Gay Studies is ridiculous" versus "The notion of universities providing students with undergraduate degrees in Transgender Studies is ridiculous"). Although the MHS has been validated in assessing prejudice held toward gay men and lesbian women (Morrison & Morrison, 2003), this is the first study to adapte this scale to measure beliefs about transgender individuals. While there are specific scales designed to measure anti-transgender attitudes (e.g., Tebbe & Morandi, 2012; Walch et al., 2012), the choice to instead adjust the MHS with reference to transgender women was made to more consistently evaluate prejudicial beliefs across the three conditions. To assess *changes* in prejudice following mediated contact, these same items were also presented after exposure to the assigned character in the second questionnaire (phase 2).

Character-specific evaluations. After watching the clips presented in the second questionnaire (phase 2), participants were asked to evaluate their assigned character in terms of warmth and competence traits using 5-point Likert scales (1 = not at all, 5 = very much). *Warmth* was again assessed using *warm*, *kind*, *friendly*, and *likable* while *competence* was measured using *competent*, *skilled*, *intelligent*, and *capable*. These measures were averaged to create composite measures for each character's perceived *warmth* ($\alpha = .92$; $M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.17$) and *competence* ($\alpha = .89$; $M = 3.86$, $SD = .91$). The subjects were also asked to report if they had ever seen media content featuring the character of interest prior to participating in the study (Yes/No).

Emotional responses. To assess emotional reactions at the *intergroup* level, participants were also provided with the same 10-point Likert scales used to assess *intergroup anxiety* (adapted from Stephan & Stephan, 1985), *intergroup empathy* (adapted from Vezzali, Giovannini, & Capozza, 2010), and *intergroup trust* (adapted from Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008) in Study 2 (see Study 2 method for more detailed descriptions). These items were reverse coded as necessary and averaged to create composite measures for *anxiety* ($\alpha = .87$, $M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.69$), *empathy* ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 4.89$, $SD = 2.47$), and *trust* ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 8.11$, $SD = 1.47$).

Results: Study 3

A series of repeated measure analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were run to determine the effect of exposure to sexual minority characters of varying stereotype content (i.e., positive versus negative/ambivalent) on generalized warmth and competence evaluations of all sexual minorities as well as levels of prejudice. With repeated measures (i.e., pre-trest/post-test) ANCOVAs, the dependent variable is the post-test measure of the

variable of interest. The pre-test measure is not entered as an outcome variable, but instead as a covariate. Thus, these models can be used to assess differences in the post-test means after accounting for pre-test values (as well as other control variables of interest). Each ANCOVA was structured to assess if mean differences exist between characters with regard to the dependent variable of interest (i.e., outgroup warmth, outgroup competence, outgroup prejudice) while controlling for pre-test levels of these variables. In addition, *mediated contact* and *close interpersonal contact* are known to influence prejudice levels, and therefore were also entered into the models as covariates. ANCOVA tests were first run across all sexual minority characters before group-specific analyses were conducted. Table 1 shows average scores for general evaluations of sexual minorities at both time points, character-specific stereotype content, and prejudice levels at both time points.

Table 1
Changes in Stereotype Content and Prejudice Following Exposure to Sexual Minority Television Characters

	Sexual Minority Character					
	LW-LC Gay Male	HW-HC Gay Male	LW-HC Lesbian	HW-HC Lesbian	LW-HC Trans	HW-HC Trans
Warmth Pre-Exposure	3.92	3.98	2.88	3.14	2.82	2.53
Character Warmth	3.02	4.31	2.37	4.46	2.26	4.33
Warmth Post-Exposure	3.53	3.82	2.55	3.27	2.47	3.03
Competence Pre-Exposure	3.67	3.29	3.34	3.35	2.62	2.37
Character Competence	2.96	4.49	3.70	4.31	3.26	4.48
Competence Post-Exposure	3.09	3.27	3.07	3.25	2.71	2.68
Prejudice Pre-Exposure	2.40	2.74	2.29	2.42	2.86	2.70
Prejudice Post-Exposure	2.39	2.61	2.32	2.26	2.73	1.96

Differences in Covariates Between Conditions (Gay versus Lesbian versus Transgender)

Descriptive analyses (Table 1) revealed that the participants had different responses in terms of overall outgroup stereotype content, prejudice, and real world contact depending on if they were asked to consider gay men, lesbian women, or transgender women in the first questionnaire. Although no explicit predictions were offered with regard to these differences, it is practically interesting to examine baseline differences in these covariates,

as this variability illustrates that these university students have different evaluations and experiences with the sexual minorities of interest to this study. Therefore, to examine if significant differences emerged in terms of the covariates between conditions (gay versus lesbian versus transgender), a series of one-way ANOVA tests and post hoc analyses were conducted. Significant differences emerged in terms of reports of close interpersonal friendships with sexual minorities depending on condition, $F(2, 185) = 29.82$, $p < .001$. The participants reported having the greatest level of close interpersonal contact with gay men ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.52$), followed by lesbians ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.34$) and transgender women ($M = 1.33$, $SD = .85$) Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the difference in reports of close friendships with gay men versus lesbians (.67, 95% CI [.13, 1.21]) was significant ($p = .01$), as was the difference in reported friendships between gay men and transgender women (1.72, 95% CI [1.19, 2.25], $p < .001$). In addition, the difference in reported close friendships with lesbians versus transgender women (1.05, 95% CI [.52, 1.57]) was significant ($p < .001$).

Significant differences also emerged in terms of levels of mediated contact with sexual minorities depending on condition, $F(2, 184) = 19.61$, $p < .001$. Again, the participants reported having the greatest level of contact via television with gay men ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.16$), followed by lesbians ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .98$) and transgender women ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.11$). Results from Tukey HSD post hoc analyses indicated that the difference in reports of mediated contact with gay men versus lesbians (.56, 95% CI [.09, 1.02]) was significant ($p = .01$), as was the difference in reported mediated contact between gay men and transgender women (1.13, 95% CI [.67, 1.59], $p < .001$). The difference in reported

media contact with lesbians versus transgender women (.56, 95% CI [.12, 1.02]) was also significant ($p < .01$).

Perceptions of warmth of sexual minorities in general that were collected pre-exposure were also found to significantly vary by condition, $F(2, 185) = 26.46$, $p < .001$, with gay men seen as being warmest ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .78$), followed by lesbians ($M = 3.01$, $SD = .82$) and transgender women ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .83$). Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD showed that warmth perceptions of gay men were significantly higher when compared to both lesbians (.94, 95% CI [.59, 1.29], $p < .001$) and transgender women (1.26, 95% CI [.92, 1.61], $p < .001$). The difference in warmth evaluations of lesbians and transgender women (.32, 95% CI [-.02, .66]) was non-significant ($p = .07$).

Similar variation across conditions emerged in terms of pre-exposure perceptions of competence, $F(2, 185) = 17.58$, $p < .001$. Gay men were seen as being most competent ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .85$), followed by lesbians ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .66$) and transgender women ($M = 2.51$, $SD = .81$). Tukey HSD post hoc tests demonstrated that the difference in competence perceptions between gay men and lesbians was non-significant (.12, 95% CI [-.21, .45], $p = .66$). However, both gay men (.96, 95% CI [.63, 1.29], $p < .001$) and lesbians (.84, 95% CI [.52, 1.16], $p < .001$) were evaluated as being significantly more competent than transgender women. Finally, initial levels of prejudice were also found to vary significantly by condition, $F(2, 185) = 2.96$, $p < .05$. The participants reported the greatest levels of prejudice held toward transgender women ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .87$), followed by gay men ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.06$) and lesbians ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.02$). A final set of Tukey HSD post hoc analyses revealed that the only significant difference in terms of initial prejudice was between transgender women and lesbians (.43, 95% CI [.02, .84], $p < .05$).

All Sexual Minority Characters

To assess overall differences between subjects exposed to positive (i.e., HW-HC) and negative/ambivalent (i.e., LW-LC or LW-HC) portrayals of sexual minorities, repeated-measures analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted across all groups of interest. Perceived warmth of all sexual minorities was greater for the groups exposed to HW-HC portrayals (M = 3.36, SD = .83) than those exposed to those with negative or ambivalent stereotype content (M = 2.81, SD = .89), a mean difference of .49, 95% CI [.28, .70], $p <$ .001. After adjustment for pre-exposure perceptions of warmth, close interpersonal contact, and mediated contact, there was a statistically significant difference in post-exposure warmth levels between conditions, $F(1,187) = 20.37$, $p < .001$. Thus, participants exposed to positive television portrayals of sexual minorities were more likely to evaluate sexual minorities in general as being warmer than those exposed to negative/ambivalent portrayals, offering partial support for **H1a**. Paired samples t-tests revealed that individuals exposed to the negative/ambivalent evaluated sexual minorities as being significantly less warm following exposure, $t(95) = 3.86$, $p < .001$, a finding which supports **H1b** and **H1c**. However, those who viewed a positive portrayal did not exhibit significant gains in warmth evaluations following exposure, $t(91) = -1.49$, $p = .14$, a finding which contradicts **H1a**.

In contrast, perceived competence of all sexual minorities did not differ between groups exposed to a negative/ambivalent portrayal (M = 2.94, SD = .99) or a positive portrayal (M = 3.05, SD = .98), even after adjusting for pre-exposure levels of competence and past contact, $F(1, 187) = .48$, $p = .49$. This contradicts the predictions offered by **H1a-c**. However, paired samples t-tests revealed that participants who were exposed to a negative/ambivalent portrayal reported significantly lower competence evaluations of sexual

minorities in general than those collected in phase 1, $t(95) = 1.98$, $p = .05$, which offers tentative support for **H1b-c**. However, people exposed to a positive characterization did not exhibit significant increases in competence evaluations following exposure, $t(91) = -1.49$, $p = .14$. It appears then that positive competence evaluations of a specific character were less likely to generalize to all sexual minorities than positive warmth evaluations, but participants that viewed a negative/ambivalent sexual minority characters reported significantly lower competence evaluations when compared to those collected before exposure.

Prejudice levels toward sexual minorities were lower for participants exposed to a positive portrayal ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.08$) than those exposed to a negative portrayal ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.19$), a mean difference of .28, 95% CI [.05, .50], $p < .05$. After controlling for pre-exposure prejudice levels and past contact, there was a statistically significant difference in post-exposure prejudice between conditions, $F(1,187) = 5.80$, $p < .05$. Therefore, participants exposed to positive television portrayals of sexual minorities were more likely to exhibit lower levels of prejudice, which partially supports the predictions offered by **H2** and **H3**. Paired samples t-tests revealed that individuals exposed to the positive portrayals had significantly lower prejudice levels following exposure, $t(91) = 5.70$, $p < .001$. However, those who viewed a negative or ambivalent portrayal did not exhibit significant gains in levels of prejudice following exposure, $t(95) = .44$, $p = .44$, which partially refutes **H2-3**.

Gay Characters

To assess overall differences between subjects exposed to either a counter-stereotypical (i.e., HW-HC) or stereotypical (i.e., LW-LC) portrayal of gay men, repeated

measures ANCOVA tests were conducted comparing participants exposed to either gay character. Perceived warmth of all gay men did not differ between groups exposed to a negative portrayal of a gay man ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .73$) or a counter-stereotypical portrayal ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .76$), even after adjusting for pre-exposure perceptions of warmth and past contact, $F(1, 58) = 1.23$, $p = .27$. However, paired samples t-tests revealed that participants exposed to the negative characterization reported significantly lower warmth evaluations post-exposure, $t(27) = 4.00$, $p < .001$. Those exposed to the positive character did not demonstrate significant increases in perceived warmth when comparing scores collected pre- and post-exposure, $t(30) = .79$, $p = .44$.

Similarly, perceived competence of all gay men did not differ between groups exposed to a negative portrayal of a gay man ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .89$) or a counter-stereotypical portrayal ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.02$), even after adjusting for pre-exposure perceptions of competence, $F(1, 58) = .99$, $p = .33$. However, paired samples t-tests revealed that participants exposed to the negative characterization reported significantly lower competence evaluations post-exposure, $t(27) = 4.22$, $p < .001$. Those exposed to the positive character did not demonstrate significant gains in perceived competence when comparing scores collected pre- and post-exposure, $t(30) = .15$, $p = .89$. Finally, prejudice levels toward gay men did not differ between groups exposed to a stereotypical portrayal ($M = 2.39$, $SD = .93$) and a counter-stereotypical portrayal ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.21$), even after adjusting for pre-exposure levels of prejudice and past contact, $F(1, 58) = 1.52$, $p = .22$. Paired samples t-tests revealed that no significant differences emerged when comparing prejudice levels reported before and after exposure for each condition. Although these differences failed to reach statistical significance, these findings indicate that individuals exposed to a HW-HC

gay character evaluated all gay men as being warmer, more competent, and reported lower levels of prejudice.

Lesbian Characters

To assess overall differences between subjects exposed to either a positive (i.e., HW-HC) or ambivalent (i.e., LW-LC) portrayal of lesbians, repeated measures ANCOVA tests were conducted comparing participants exposed to either lesbian character. Perceived warmth of all lesbians was greater for the group exposed to a positive portrayal of a lesbian (M = 3.27, SD = .82) than those exposed to an ambivalent portrayal (M = 2.55, SD = .76), a mean difference of .59, 95% CI [.25, .92], p = .001. After controlling for pre-exposure perceptions of warmth and past contact, there was a statistically significant difference in post-exposure warmth levels between conditions, $F(1,63) = 12.33$, p = .001. Paired samples t-tests revealed that participants exposed to the character of ambivalent stereotype content had significantly worse competence evaluations when comparing scores collected pre- and post-exposure, $t(31) = 2.38$, $p < .05$. However, those that watched the positive character did not exhibit significantly more favorable warmth evaluations following exposure, $t(30) = -1.01$, p = .32. Thus, participants exposed to a lesbian character with positive stereotype content were more likely to rate lesbians in general as being warmer than those exposed to an ambivalent portrayal. Further, these warmth scores were significantly lower than those collected pre-exposure for those exposed to the ambivalent character, demonstrating a negative generalization effect.

In contrast, perceived competence of all lesbians did not differ between groups exposed to an ambivalent portrayal of a lesbian (M = 3.07, SD = .95) or a positive portrayal (M = 3.25, SD = .88), even after adjusting for pre-exposure perceptions of competence and

past contact, $F(1, 63) = .47$, $p = .50$. Paired samples t-tests revealed that no significant differences emerged when comparing competence perceptions reported before and after exposure for each condition, suggesting neither a positive nor a negative generalization effect with regard to competence. As lesbians are stereotyped as being highly competent, these characters were not expected to differ significantly in terms of competence. Prejudice levels toward lesbians were greater for subjects exposed to a stereotypical portrayal ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.03$) and a counter-stereotypical portrayal ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.13$) after adjusting for pre-exposure levels of prejudice and past contact, $F(1, 63) = 2.24$, $p = .14$, though this difference failed to achieve statistical significance at $p < .05$. However, paired-samples t-tests revealed that participants exposed to the lesbian character of positive stereotype content had significantly lower prejudice levels when comparing scores collected pre- and post-exposure, $t(30) = 2.13$, $p < .05$. However, those that watched the ambivalent character did not exhibit significantly more prejudicial attitudes following exposure, $t(31) = -.26$, $p = .80$. Thus, these findings suggest that exposure to a positive portrayal of a lesbian significantly improved prejudice, while exposure to an ambivalent portrayal did not significantly increase antipathy.

Transgender Characters

To assess overall differences between subjects exposed to either a positive (i.e., HW-HC) or ambivalent (i.e., LW-HC) portrayal of transgender women, repeated measures ANCOVA tests were conducted comparing participants exposed to either transgender character. Perceived warmth of all transgender women was greater for the group exposed to a positive portrayal of a trans woman ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .74$) than those exposed to an ambivalent portrayal ($M = 2.46$, $SD = .79$), a mean difference of .36, 95% CI [-.05, .76], $p =$

.08. After adjustment for pre-exposure perceptions of warmth, the difference in post-exposure warmth levels between conditions failed to reach statistical significance at $p < .05$, $F(1,66) = 3.06$, $p = .08$. Further, paired samples t-tests revealed that individuals exposed to the character with positive stereotype content evaluated transgender women as being significantly warmer when comparing scores collected pre- and post-exposure, $t(29) = -3.09$, $p < .01$. However, those who viewed the ambivalent portrayal did not exhibit significant decreases in warmth evaluations following exposure, $t(35) = .55$, $p = .59$. Thus, participants exposed to a transgender character with positive stereotype content were more likely to evaluate transgender women in general as being warmer than those exposed to an ambivalent portrayal. Further, warmth scores were significantly higher for those exposed to the positive portrayal than those collected pre-exposure, demonstrating a positive generalization effect. However, perceived competence of all transgender women did not differ between groups exposed to an ambivalent portrayal ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.07$) or a positive portrayal ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .97$), even after adjusting for pre-exposure levels of competence and past contact, $F(1, 66) = .31$, $p = .58$. As the negative transgender character was evaluated as being LW-HC, the characters were not expected to differ significantly in terms of competence. Paired samples t-tests revealed that no significant differences emerged when comparing competence evaluations reported before and after exposure for each condition. In addition, prejudice levels were greater in the group exposed to a negative portrayal ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.45$) than those exposed to a positive portrayal ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .76$), a mean difference of .73, 95% *CI* [.14, 1.32], $p < .05$. After adjustment for pre-exposure prejudice scores and past contact, there was a statistically significant difference in post-exposure prejudice levels between conditions, $F(1,66) = 6.19$, $p < .05$. Paired samples

t-tests revealed that individuals exposed to the character with positive stereotype content reported significantly lower prejudice levels when comparing scores collected pre- and post-exposure, $t(29) = 6.31$, $p < .001$. However, participants that viewed the character with ambivalent stereotype content did not report significantly higher levels of prejudice following exposure, $t(35) = .55$, $p = .59$. Thus, participants exposed to a transgender character with positive stereotype content reported significantly lower levels of prejudice than those exposed to an ambivalent portrayal. Furthermore, prejudice scores were significantly lower for participants that viewed the positive portrayal than those collected pre-exposure.

Intergroup Emotions

To examine if differences emerged in terms of intergroup emotional responses between social group conditions (i.e., gay versus lesbian versus transgender), a series of one-way ANOVA tests and post hoc analyses were conducted. No significant differences emerged between the overall sexual minority groups in terms *intergroup anxiety*, $F(2,187) = 1.06$, $p = .35$, *intergroup empathy*, $F(2,187) = 1.74$, $p = .18$, and *intergroup trust*, $F(2,187) = .39$, $p = .68$. Next, to examine differences in affective responses between positive and negative/ambivalent characterizations of sexual minorities, independent sample t-tests were run comparing characters belonging to the same social group. No significant differences emerged between the positive and negative gay character in terms of the affective mediators of intergroup contact, which partially refutes **H4**.

Participants exposed to the lesbian character with ambivalent stereotype content ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.89$) felt significantly more intergroup anxiety than those exposed to the positive characterization ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 2.96$), $t(61) = 3.46$, $p = .001$. In addition,

participants felt significantly more trust toward the positive lesbian character (M = 8.56, SD = 1.24) than the ambivalent character (M = 7.77, SD = 1.86), $t(61) = -1.98$, $p = .05$. However, the lesbian characters did not differ in terms of empathic responses, $t(61) = -1.67$, $p = .10$. Thus, partial support for **H4** was found with regard to the lesbian characters. In contrast, the transgender characters produced significantly different reactions in terms of all the intergroup emotions of interest, in line with the predictions offered by **H4**. The character with positive stereotype content (M = 2.69, SD = 1.10) was less anxiety provoking than the transgender character with ambivalent stereotype content (M = 4.07, SD = 1.59), $t(64) = 3.98$, $p < .001$. Participants were less likely to trust the ambivalent character (M = 7.70, SD = 1.24) than the positive character (M = 8.76, SD = 1.12), $t(64) = -3.61$, $p = .001$. Similarly, participants were better able to empathize with the positive character (M = 5.79, SD = 2.53) than the ambivalent character (M = 3.49, SD = 1.95), $t(64) = -4.17$, $p < .001$.

Discussion: Study 3

Following the impression-formation paradigm, this longitudinal study sought to explore variability in audience reactions to sexual minority character of positive, negative, and ambivalent stereotype content. Specifically, this project was concerned with the potential for warmth and competence evaluations of a specific television character to generalize to judgments of an entire social outgroup (i.e., individual-to-group generalization). In addition, warmth and competence variables were presented as metrics that could be used to predict the valence of mediated intergroup contact. When taken together, the results of this experiment generally support the notion that high status and warm outgroup characters are more likely to improve stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs than those with negative or ambivalent stereotype content. However, positive evaluations of

an outgroup character's competence were less likely to generalize than those of a character's warmth. Although these relationships were most pronounced with regard to groups that the participants reported having limited contact with in their everyday lives (i.e., transgender women), mediated contact was less likely to change outgroup perceptions for gay men and lesbian women– groups that these subjects more frequently encounter as close friends and on television.

Generalization Effects

As work in social psychology has established that information about an individual group member is readily incorporated into group-level judgments (e.g., McIntyre et al., 2016), it was expected that perceptions of a sexual minority character's stereotype content would generalize to the outgroup as a whole. Interestingly, the findings of this study indicate that evaluations of outgroup competitiveness (i.e., warmth) are more amenable following mediated contact with a single television character than judgments of that group's relative status (i.e., competence). This finding is consistent with past research that has demonstrated that the warmth dimension of stereotype content is oftentimes more influential when interpreting outgroup motivations and behavior (e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2006; Wojciszke, 1994). However, the valence of warmth generalization outcomes varied between the groups of interest.

For some sexual minority groups, a *negative* warmth generalization effect emerged. Participants that were exposed to an ambivalent (i.e., low warmth, high competence) characterization of a lesbian or a negative (i.e., low warmth, low competence) gay male character reported significantly lower warmth evaluations all members of these groups following the media exposure treatment. Contrary to the predictions offered by H1, high

warmth evaluations of positive gay and lesbian characters did not significantly improve general warmth evaluations of all gay men and lesbians post-exposure. It appears then that gay and lesbian characters with warmth definiteness can impact perceptions of outgroup competition whereas those presented in a manner consistent with ingroup members and close allies are less influential. In contrast (and in support of H1a), a *positive* warmth generalization effect emerged with regard to the transgender characters such that participants exposed to the warm and high status character felt that all transgender women were warmer. However, exposure to the ambivalent transgender character did not significantly worsen overall warmth evaluations.

There are several potential explanations for these group-based differences in the valence of warmth generalization outcomes. Of all the sexual minority groups, transgender women received the lowest pre-exposure warmth scores, and constituted the only group that was rated as being definitively "low-warmth" in the SCM (i.e., < 3.00 on the 5-point warmth composite measure). Thus, there was significantly more room for improvement with regard to overall warmth evaluations of transgender women than for gay men and lesbian women. In other words, high warmth evaluations were more stereotype disconfirming in nature for the positive transgender character than for the gay and lesbian characters. Therefore, positive warmth evaluations of a transgender woman more readily generalized to the entire outgroup than the stereotype-confirming low warmth evaluations of the ambivalent transgender character. Relatedly, for gay men and lesbians, there was greater potential for warmth scores to fall following exposure to stereotype-confirming information presented by the low warmth exemplars. Understanding a social group's baseline level of perceived

competitiveness may be key to understanding the directionality of warmth generalization following mediated contact.

Contrary to the predictions offered by **H1**, perceptions of general competence were largely unchanged following exposure to either a positive or negative/ambivalent characterization. Again, past research has suggested a warmth-over-competence pattern wherein judgments of an individual's warmth play more of a central role than competence in the perception of outgroup behavior (e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). The observed primacy of warmth over competence has been explained as a function of the core need for individuals to determine the intention of others (and their ability to enact those intentions) in order to survive in social situations (Fiske et al., 2007). With this in mind, whether a person is beneficial or harmful (i.e., warm) is often more salient than their relative status (i.e., competence). While only a single dimension of stereotype content generalized to broader evaluations of sexual minorities, past research suggests these changes in warmth are potentially more consequential in terms of an overall understanding of an outgroup's intentions and behaviors.

Another possible reason for these mixed generalization findings could be related to the *quantity* of characters that served as stimuli. Past meta-analytic work (McIntyre et al., 2016) has found support for the bookkeeping model, which argues that stereotypes are changed incrementally from each additional piece of stereotype-disconfirming information. In other words, exposure to *several* moderately atypical exemplars has been found maximize positive generalization outcomes. In this study, participants were only shown a single sexual minority character. It is possible that multiple exemplars are necessary to influence general evaluations of a group's relative status. Still, the fact that warmth generalization outcomes

were found in some cases after exposure to just a single character demonstrates the utility of these measures for this area of research.

SCM variables were presented as measures that could possibly improve the study of individual-to-group generalization by facilitating comparisons between diverse social groups beyond the more commonly used group-specific stereotypes. The findings from Study 3 offer tentative support for the notion that assessments of outgroup warmth provide a universal and standardized metric for measuring generalization outcomes. However, competence evaluations were largely unchanged and therefore failed to capture changes in outgroup beliefs following mediated contact. While incorporating warmth evaluations into individual-to-group generalization research would certainty facilitate direct comparisons between diverse target groups, these measures alone may be sufficient enough to capture the range of intergroup cognitions that may be impacted by a single exemplar. Therefore, using both stereotype content measures of warmth and group-specific stereotype scales may be an ideal approach in this area of research.

Contact Valence and Prejudice Reduction

Another central goal of Study 3 was to explore the potential for sexual minority characters of different stereotype content to facilitate either positive or negative mediated intergroup contact. When considering the findings from Study 2, which suggested that competence evaluations of sexual minorities are related to the affective mediators of intergroup contact, H2 predicted that sexual minority characters with positive stereotype content have the greatest potential to facilitate positive contact (i.e., reduce prejudice). In contrast, those characters defined by negative or ambivalent stereotype content were proposed as potential facilitators of negative (i.e., prejudice increasing) contact. The findings

from Study 3 ultimately suggest that exposure to sexual minority characters of positive stereotype content can facilitate positive intergroup contact, while exposure to negative or ambivalent characters did not necessarily constitute negative contact experiences.

As with the results concerning individual-to-group generalization, important group-based differences emerged between conditions with regard to changes in overall levels of prejudice. Transgender women – met with the highest levels of initial antipathy pre-exposure – were the only group for which significant changes in prejudice were observed between the positive and ambivalent character conditions. Indeed, participants that viewed the positive representation of a transgender woman reported significantly lower levels of prejudice post-exposure. In a similar vein, exposure to a positive representation of a lesbian woman was also associated with less prejudice, though this association failed to reach statistical significance ($p = .14$). However, as participants exposed to the positive lesbian character had significantly lower prejudice levels when comparing pre- and post-exposure scores, it seems likely that this relationship would have reached significance with a larger sized sample. Importantly though, exposure to the ambivalent representations of members for these groups was not associated with *increases* in prejudice when compared to the baseline measures collected pre-exposure, contrary to the predictions offered by H2. Thus, it appears that either (a) stereotype content measures are ineffective in predicting negative mediated contact experiences or (b) subtyping of these characters occurred and exposure to *multiple* characters with warmth and competence deficiencies is necessary to increase general prejudicial beliefs. Future studies should empirically test these possibilities.

Despite the fact that the gay condition included the only character that was deficient in *both* warmth and competence (i.e., negative stereotype content), there were no differences

in levels of prejudice following exposure to either the positive or negative characterization. A likely cause of this lack of findings is that the university students used in this study reported higher levels of close interpersonal friendships and televised contact with gay men when compared to lesbians and transgender women. When considering the relative frequency with which these students encounter gay men in the real world and on television, the lack of contact (and generalization) outcomes following exposure to a single gay character in a short clip is unsurprising. Although mediated contact is especially effective in improving prejudice for people with limited contact with a social outgroup in their everyday lives (Park, 2012), the close friendships that many of the participants engage in with gay men are likely to have a stronger influence on overall levels of homonegativity (Turner & Crisp, 2007). Still, the results concerning the transgender characters – a group for which students reported having significantly less contact with – speaks to the potential for even short-term mediated contact to improve prejudice levels for certain outgroups.

As anxiety, empathy, and trust have been identified as key mediators in the contact-prejudice association (see Study 2), participants were also asked to rate their emotional responses to their assigned character at the intergroup level. Whereas Study 2 looked at how warmth and competence evaluations were *structurally* related to these emotions, the current study examined differences in emotional responses following exposure to either positive or negative/ambivalent characterizations. The gay characters did not differ in terms of evoking any of these intergroup emotions, which further illustrates why there was no observed difference in prejudicial responses post-exposure. However, affective responses did vary between the lesbian and transgender characters. Participants felt less anxiety, higher levels and trust, and more empathy toward the transgender character with positive stereotype

content than the ambivalent character. The same was true of the lesbian characters with regard to anxiety and trust, though they did not differ significantly in terms of empathy. Thus, these findings contribute to preliminary results offered by Study 2 and further demonstrate the social benefits of representing certain minority groups in the media as highly competent and warm.

Theoretical and Practical Considerations

When taken together, these results have considerable implications with regard to (a) the effectiveness of mediated contact interventions for different audience members, (b) best practices for media content producers interesting in maximizing prosocial outcomes, and (c) the utility of a SCM approach to understanding mediated intergroup contact. Media effects research has documented the ways in which individual difference factors can influence how audience members select, interpret, and recall media content (Oliver, 2002). Relatedly, the results of Study 3 suggest that there are certain audience characteristics that influence the effectiveness of mediated intergroup contact. Specifically, mediated contact should yield the strongest outcomes with regard to groups that individuals have low amounts of contact with in their everyday lives. This finding is consistent with the tenants of mediated intergroup contact theory, which explicitly states that vicarious contact is most effective for individuals with limited contact with the outgroup in the real world (Park, 2012). For these individuals, media messages can especially powerful in shaping attitudes and beliefs related to social outgroups. Indeed, other media effects research from a cultivation perspective has concluded that exposure to television messages will be most influential when the content does not compete with real world knowledge (Hawkins & Pingree, 1990). As these participants had relatively frequent contact with gay men and – though to a lesser extent – lesbians, it is less

surprising that exposure to short clips featuring a single character had little influence on overall prejudice levels. Future work in this domain should target stigmatized groups that American participants are unlikely to encounter as close friends or on television, such as homeless individuals or Native Americans (i.e., groups that are chronically underrepresented across the media landscape).

From a media production standpoint, the findings from Study 3 further demonstrate the merits of presenting sexual minority outgroup members as highly competent and warm. With the advent of social media, audiences have unprecedented and oftentimes instantaneous access to industry professionals. As such, there are highly publicized examples of audiences holding production companies accountable for unflattering portrayals of minority groups. To avoid such potential backlash, content writers and producers concerned with creating auspicious portrayals of minorities should strive to craft characters that are esteemed, non-threatening, and behave similarly to the characters from more dominant social groups. Findings concerning the directionality of warmth generalization effects suggest that is especially true for groups that are seen as being highly threatening (i.e., low warmth). Therefore, LW groups (e.g., Jews, Asians, welfare recipients; Fiske et al., 2002) would potentially benefit most from HW-HC representation.

However, it is essential that the group identity of these characters is still made salient to audience members so that the benefits of mediated contact transfer to the entire outgroup. For sexual minorities, this can be difficult to achieve without forcing the character to explicitly "come out", as gender identity and sexual orientation may not be as readily apparent as race or ethnicity. Future work should examine if stereotype content evaluations change before and after such admissions. It would also be important to consider if the way in

which a show frames these stories influences a character's potential to facilitate positive mediated contact.

Still, when considering the merits of a SCM approach to understanding the valence of mediated intergroup contact, these findings didn't necessarily indicate that exposure to characters with warmth or competence deficiencies is inherently harmful. In fact, exposure to the ambivalent or negative portrayals did not *increase* prejudice levels for any of the sexual minority groups in question. This finding is consistent with work by Sink and Mastro (2017b), which found that American adults who reported watching animated programs that are frequently criticized for lampooning minorities (e.g., *South Park*, *The Simpsons*) still held the most favorable attitudes toward gay men in general. It may be the case that as with direct contact, positive mediated contact experiences outnumber negative ones and are therefore more influential on overall attitudes and beliefs. More work is needed to understand both the quantity and quality of characterizations necessary to facilitate negative contact experiences.

Conclusion: Study 3

Although there are important group-based differences regarding the influence on stereotype content measures on general outgroup attitudes and prejudice, the results from this study indicate that there are clear potential social benefits to presenting sexual minorities as highly warm on television. Specifically, perceptions of a single character's warmth influenced group-level judgments related to intergroup competition in meaningful ways. For the sexual minority groups that the participants had more frequent contact with in their everyday lives (i.e., gay men and lesbians), a negative generalization effect emerged such that exposure to a cold character negatively impacted warmth perceptions for all

outgroup members. In contrast, a positive generalization effect emerged with regard to transgender women, a group with which these students have limited real world and mediated contact. Exposure to a warm transgender character was associated with viewing all transgender women as being more similar to the ingroup and even reduced levels of prejudice when compared to those collected pre-exposure. Thus, these results offer evidence concerning the potential benefits of HW-HC characters in improving intergroup attitudes and beliefs.

Contrary to our predictions, competence evaluations of a single character did not generalize to perceptions of the outgroup's relative status. However, assessments of a character's competence may offer more insights regarding intergroup affect. Recall that results from Study 2 indicated that a sexual minority character's competence were structurally more predictive of the affective mediators of intergroup contact than warmth. It seems possible, then, that perceptions of a single character's warmth have the potential to change the way in which a viewer *understands* the intentions of a social outgroup whereas perceived competence influences the way in which a viewer *feels* toward similar outgroup members. As the next chapter will discuss in detail, future research should continue to incorporate measures of stereotype content into empirical examinations of media stereotypes across a wide range of target groups.

Chapter 6: Overarching Discussion - Theoretical Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

This final chapter will re-summarize major findings gleaned from the results of Studies 1-3 to broadly address the successes and shortcomings of this dissertation project. By integrating aspects of the stereotype content model with mediated intergroup contact theory, the overarching goals of these studies were to (a) expand knowledge concerning the effects of exposure to media that features sexual minorities, (b) redirect attention toward the universal dimensions underlying stereotypes rather than the narrow, group-specific characterizations that are typically examined, and (c) potentially explain why mediated contact is effective in reducing prejudice for some groups and not others. In so doing, this research contributed to the small but growing body of research that has advocated the SCM as a theoretical framework that can advance the study of media stereotypes in novel, theory-driven, and socially meaningful ways (Sink, Mastro, & Dragojevic, 2017). Of course, these studies were not without flaws, and the limitations of the research designs used in Studies 1-3 will be discussed in detail. Finally, future areas of inquiry will be presented for researchers interested in continuing to integrate SCM with mediated intergroup contact theory to understand the cognitive, affective, and behavior effects of media stereotypes.

Study 1: Warmth, Competence, and the Optimal Conditions of Mediated Intergroup Contact

The primary goal of the pilot study was to identify characterizations of gay men, lesbians, and transgender women that fell into distinct quadrants of the SCM and would later serve as stimuli in Studies 2 and 3. However, the pilot test was designed in such a way that findings would illustrate the utility of stereotype content measures in predicting the cognitive moderators (i.e., optimal conditions) of mediated intergroup contact. Specifically,

analyses were run that tested structural relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of sexual minority characters with *outgroup typicality* and *ingroup similarity*. Across all the groups of interest, warmth and competence were effective in predicting feelings of closeness to characters at the intergroup level, such that audiences could more easily relate to and identify with characters of positive stereotype content. This is a consequential finding when considering both the mediated intergroup contact and parasocial relationship literatures. Media characters often serve identity-related needs in similar ways to real world interpersonal relationships (Cohen, 2001), so having a standardized metric for evaluating a character's potential to facilitate these relationships is useful to academics interested in understanding these bonds. Furthermore, these insights are equally valuable for industry professionals in advertising, marketing, and entertainment who are often concerned with creating characters audiences will care about. To maximize profits across diverse audiences, Study 1 suggests that HW-HC characters have the greatest mass appeal in terms of establishing feelings of connectedness.

However, important group-based differences emerged with regard to the utility of SCM measures in predicting levels of typicality. For gay male characters, deficiencies in competence were significantly related to perceived typicality, suggesting that to be "typically gay" is to be a member of a relatively low status group. In line with past SCM research, highly typical lesbians were defined by deficiencies in warmth with high levels of competence (i.e., ambivalent stereotype content). For transgender female characters, neither warmth nor competence was related to perceptions of outgroup typicality, as each of the two characters were seen as being *moderately* typical. This was suggested to be a result of the

fact that transgender individuals have only drawn mainstream attention in recent years when compared to gays and lesbians, so the norms for this group are less known.

In terms of the overarching goals of the dissertation project, Study 1 demonstrated that warmth and competence variables could be used to understand differences in cognitive responses to sexual minority characters following mediated contact. While the effectiveness of SCM measures in assessing typicality varied by group, positive evaluations of several effeminate gay and masculine lesbian characters suggested that warmth and competence measures are more reliable in assessing antipathy toward these characters than deviance from gender norms. As sexual minorities continue to gain mainstream acceptance (especially among younger generations), the reliance traditional measurements of sex roles in understanding LGBT stereotypes may become obsolete and outdated. As these findings demonstrated, measurements of masculinity and femininity are not sufficient in understanding overall evaluative responses toward sexual minority characters. Indeed, this was the first of several findings from the dissertation that demonstrate the advantages of universal measures of stereotypes over group-specific stereotype scales.

In terms of understanding why contact interventions are more beneficial for certain target groups than others, Study 1 demonstrated that outgroup exemplars from the same group can vary in terms of their potential to foster feelings of ingroup similarity. These findings offered compelling evidence that viewers feel closer to warm and high status sexual minority characters, as these characterizations are in line with the ingroup and other culturally dominant reference groups. Thus, it may be the case that mediated contact interventions are more effective for certain target groups because the outgroup exemplars more closely represent positive stereotype content. A meta-analysis of the contact studies

that asks researchers to evaluate their stimuli in terms of warmth and competence would be a valuable endeavor. Furthermore, these results showed variability between social groups with regard to participants' general knowledge of norms and typical outgroup features. Thus, it may be the case that an SCM approach to evaluating the optimal conditions of mediated intergroup contact is not appropriate for *every* social group. Because this integrated theoretical framework was presented as being advantageous over other designs for its ability to facilitate comparisons across countless social groups, this could be a major shortcoming of this approach. As such, more work is needed that replicates this design across a broader range of target groups, especially those that are still developing mainstream recognition (e.g., asexuals, gender fluid individuals, Generation Z).

Study 2: Warmth, Competence, and the Affective Mediators of Mediated Intergroup Contact

Having identified sexual minority characters with salient group identities and of distinct stereotype content, Study 2 built from the pilot study (Study 1) by examining how warmth and competence are related to the affective mediators of intergroup contact. Specifically, analyses were conducted to test the structural relationships between warmth and competence evaluations of sexual minority characters with feelings of intergroup anxiety, intergroup empathy, and intergroup trust. In general, analyses indicated non-competitive and high status sexual minority characters have greater potential to reduce prejudice than characters of mixed or negative stereotype content because warmth and competence were negatively related to anxiety yet positively related to feelings of trust and empathy. In other words, these characters were most effective in evoking intergroup emotions in a way that is known to facilitate prejudice reduction.

Importantly, group-based differences emerged when comparing affective responses to the gay, lesbian, and transgender characters. The lesbian characters were the only group for which *both* warmth and competence scores were negatively related to anxiety. For gay and transgender characters, only competence evaluations were indicative of lower levels of anxiety, possibly because these characters were less threatening to the predominately female sample. Thus, there may be important audience demographic or psychographic features like gender that influence the relationships between stereotype content and intergroup anxiety. Future studies should directly measure how participants perceive social outgroups in terms of the type of threat they evoke.

Across these groups, the subjects found the sexual minority characters of positive stereotype content no easier to empathize with than the characters with ambivalent or negative stereotype content, and the transgender women were the only set of characters to evoke significantly different levels of intergroup empathy. The lack of findings here deviates from other work on media stereotypes that has found that the influence of media primed group-specific stereotypes (i.e., Blacks as criminals) on support for social welfare is mediated by empathic responses (Johnson et al., 2009). With this in mind, group-specific stereotypes may be more meaningfully related to empathy that stereotype content. Future research designs should incorporate both universal and group-dependent stereotype scales to further disentangle these relationships.

While *both* warmth and competence were significant predictors of intergroup trust for the gay and lesbian characters, *only* competence evaluations mattered for the transgender women. When taken together, these results indicated that competence was more consistently related to the affective mediators of intergroup contact than warmth. The primacy of

competence evaluations in predicting intergroup affect suggested by these analyses contradicts past SCM research that has suggested warmth is superior competence with regard to understanding intergroup *behavior* and intention (Fiske et al., 2007). Given that SCM research proposes that affect is an antecedent of intergroup behavior, it seems likely that warmth and competence perceptions work together to influence how we both feel and behave toward members of social outgroups.

Again, these mixed results suggest that a SCM approach to understanding mediated intergroup contact is more appropriate for some social groups than others. Thus, the primary advantage of this integrated framework may not lie in its ability to facilitate comparisons across countless social groups. More work is still needed across a wider array of target groups to speak to this potential issue. However, these results are still highly consequential for both academics and entertainment industry professionals. This study was among the first to explicitly identify media characters attributes that encourage prejudice reduction via intergroup affect. From these findings, it would appear that a character's competence is most predictive of anxiety, empathy, and trust. Of course, one of Allport's (1954) optimal conditions of intergroup contact is that the communicators should be of relatively equal status. From a SCM perspective, competence is indicative of a group's relative status in relation to other social groups. Thus, competence metrics may just be measuring a well-established condition of positive contact in a novel way (i.e., at the intergroup level).

Given the consistency with which high competence was related to reduced anxiety and heightened trust, these results suggest that characters with positive stereotype content have greater potential to reduce prejudice (i.e., facilitate positive intergroup contact) than those with negative or ambivalent stereotype content. In terms of further theoretical

contributions, this was among the first studies to examine how warmth and competence are related to intergroup affect beyond the responses of envy, pity, disgust, and admiration offered by the SCM/BIAS Map. As these variables were consistently related to 2 of the 3 key affective mediators, warmth and competence offer useful metrics for researchers interested in optimizing mediated contact with social minorities. From these findings, mediated contact interventions could be designed to see if exposure to HW-HC outgroup characters eases intergroup tensions in segregated or conflict-stricken areas by changes the way people feel toward each other.

Entertainment industry professionals may also find the insights gleaned from Study 2 useful when crafting media messages that target specific emotional responses in mass audiences. Depending on the goals of the content producers, it may be advantageous to design characters that either exacerbate or alleviate feelings of intergroup anxiety. For example, horror films often capitalize on fears and stereotypes associated with foreign cultures (e.g., *The Green Inferno* and tribal cannibalism; *Poltergeist* and Native American burial grounds). The creators of these films may evoke stronger fear responses by portraying antagonists as both cold and incompetent. In other contexts (e.g., public health campaigns, cultural sensitivity training), it may be important to reduce intergroup anxiety, in which case characters would benefit from positive stereotype content. Furthermore, advertisers looking to foster feelings of trust in a product or brand would be wise to incorporate HW-HC spokespersons into their messages. Thus, while the social implications of the results of Study 2 are readily apparent, the impact of these results could potentially span beyond academia.

Study 3: Stereotype Change and Prejudice Reduction Following Mediated Contact with Sexual Minorities of Varying Stereotype Content

The first two studies established that highly warm and competent sexual minority characters more closely meet the optimal conditions of intergroup contact and are more likely to evoke feelings of intergroup trust while lessening anxiety than those with deficiencies in warmth and/or competence. With this in mind, Study 3 empirically tested the effects of exposure to positive versus negative/ambivalent characters on outgroup stereotypes and prejudice while controlling for factors such as levels of real world and mediated contact with the outgroup of interest. In general, warmth evaluations of a single character influenced group-level judgments related to intergroup competition in predictable ways. For the gay and lesbian characters, a *negative* generalization effect emerged such that exposure to a low warmth character negatively impacted warmth perceptions for all outgroup members. In contrast, a *positive* generalization effect emerged with regard to transgender women, a group with which these students reported having limited real world and mediated contact. Importantly though, a character's perceived competence did not generalize to broader outgroup evaluations of status. So, while competence character evaluations were found to be highly influential with regard to intergroup affect in Study 2, these results suggest that perceptions of an outgroup's overall status are less influenced by media exemplars. Warmth evaluations are more relevant here – though the nature of these relationships is dependent on individual difference factors. Again, these group-based differences indicate that there are important audience features that influence these media effects processes, including an individual's pre-existing stereotypes and prior experiences with outgroup members.

However, exposure to the transgender character with positive stereotype content was associated with significant decreases in prejudice. The same was true of exposure to the positive lesbian character, though this finding only approached statistical significance. These findings support the notion that some HW-HC characters can facilitate *positive* mediated intergroup contact. There was not evidence for *negative* mediated intergroup contact after exposure to the negative and ambivalent characterizations. Thus, exposure to certain warm and competent characters was sufficient to improve prejudice, but exposure to ambivalent or negative characters did not result in increased prejudice. From these findings, the SCM approach to understanding mediated contact may not be appropriate with regard to instances of negative contact. In addition, there were no changes in prejudice levels between participants exposed to the negative and positive gay male characters, likely because students reported frequent close contact with other members of these groups in their everyday lives. Again, audiences with limited contact with the target group would appear to be among the most influenced by positive mediated contact with sexual minorities.

With regard to this dissertation's overarching goals, Study 3 contributed to the small body of literature that has directly explored the effects of mediated contact with sexual minorities on intergroup attitudes and beliefs. As this study was longitudinal in design, it offers compelling evidence that even brief media exposure to a warm and competent outgroup member can *change* outgroup stereotypes to be more in line with the ingroup and *improve* prejudicial beliefs, especially for group members that viewers are unlikely to interact with in their everyday lives (e.g., transgender women). For other more commonly encountered groups (e.g., gay men), exposure to multiple exemplars may be necessary to change attitudes and beliefs. Although group-based differences emerged in terms of the

extent to which exposure to a sexual minority character *changed* outgroup perceptions and prejudice levels, these findings illustrate the merits of presenting outgroup characters as both warm and competent. Still, these results (along with those from studies 1 and 2) further suggest that SCM variables do not operate uniformly with regard to media characters from each social group in question. In other words, the theoretical models presented in this dissertation are not a "one size fits all" solution for studying mediated contact with all social outgroups. More work is needed to understand *why* certain social groups are more appropriate for this integrated theoretical framework.

When considering the results of Studies 2 and 3 together, it would appear that warmth and competence influence intergroup perceptions in different yet consequential ways. Whereas perceptions of a single character's warmth have the potential to change the way in which a viewer *understands* the intentions of a social outgroup (i.e., their relative competitiveness), perceived competence influences the way in which a viewer *feels* toward members of social outgroups (e.g., trust, anxiety). Therefore, entertainment content producers interested in providing high quality representations of underserved groups should strive to create and cast characters that exemplify *both* warmth and competence. The results from these studies would suggest that even brief exposure to these types of portrayals could improve intergroup relations.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several important limitations to the studies presented in this dissertation, and as such the results, their implications, and generalizability should be interpreted with caution. First, the participants for these studies were drawn from a convenience sample of undergraduate students on the West Coast that were required to take part in research projects

for course credit. Past research has demonstrated that university students are not representative of the general American public (see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). It is important to also note that younger generations tend to hold the most accepting attitudes toward homosexuality (Hicks & Lee, 2006). The samples were predominantly female, and women are also known to hold more positive attitudes toward gay men than heterosexual males (Herek, 2000). This could possibly explain several unanticipated results related to the gay characters, including (a) why the pilot study failed to identify a HW-LC character, (b) why competence evaluations of a single gay character failed to generalize to the outgroup as a whole, and (c) why there were no significant changes in prejudice held toward gay men following exposure to a positive or negative portrayal.

Still, the fact that certain findings *did* emerge in this young, liberal sample shows that measure of stereotype content are effective in differentiating and establishing the quality of sexual minority characters. Researchers interested in expanding this program of research should attempt to reach older subjects in less liberal parts of the country where sexual minorities may not be as widely accepted or are encountered less frequently. It will also be important to consider how members of minority groups perceive representations of their own group differently in terms of stereotype content.

Another major limitation of this research has to do with the stimuli used to collect character evaluations. In these studies, mediated contact with a sexual minority consisted of exposure to short clips featuring characters introducing themselves in "confessional" interviews that are common to the reality television genre. This style of content was selected to more closely replicate the experience of communicating with a person face-to-face during an initial interaction, and is comparable to the stimulus used in other research on intergroup

contact (see McIntyre et al., 2016). However, these clips were not necessarily representative of the way in which sexual minorities are presented across all entertainment media.

First, characters are known to *change* throughout the narrative of a television show (Mittell, 2006). The progression of a character's story arc could result in drastic changes in perceived warmth or competence over time. In addition, these clips did not show the characters engaging with other ingroup or outgroup members. It is possible that the way in which other characters treat sexual minority characters could influence stereotype content evaluations. As Park (2012) notes, viewers can form strong parasocial relationships with members of their own social groups that engage with minorities. The ways in which these ingroup members behave toward outgroup members (e.g., helping, harming) can influence intergroup cognition and behavior. Thus, exposure to a single confessional-style interview is not very indicative of how a viewer would naturally encounter a sexual minority character in the media. Still, as these projects were more concerned with theoretical implications than simulating naturalistic media consumption, the confessional clips were effective for the goals of this research. Future research that takes an SCM approach to understanding mediated contact outcomes would benefit from (a) using full-length stimuli as opposed to edited clips, (b) exposing participants to *multiple* outgroup exemplars, (c) selecting characters from fictional entertainment programs where content producers have more direct influence over character development, (c) incorporating content that includes ingroup and outgroup members communicating, and (d) assessing *changes* in perceived stereotype content throughout a character's story arc. It may also be important to select characters from groups that more clearly array into the HW-LC (e.g., housewives, the elderly) and LW-LC

(e.g., the homeless, welfare recipients) quadrants of the SCM than the sexual minorities examined in this project.

Major questions remain concerning the extent to which the sexual minority characters used in these studies are representative of trends in the current media landscape. Again, the characters were selected with primarily theoretical considerations in mind, and it is possible that they do not represent the predominant characterizations that viewers are likely to naturally encounter. Therefore, it would be a valuable endeavor for future content analytic work to incorporate measures of warmth and competence into their research designs concerning social minorities. From these types of studies, it would be possible for researchers to plot how characters array into distinct clusters across the SCM based on their various group memberships. These content analyses would deepen our understanding of both the quantity and quality of representation of various groups across the media, and would allow researchers to make specific predictions concerning the likely affective and behavioral responses to large numbers of characters. Furthermore, this would deepen our understanding of what constitutes stereotypicality across various social groups, and the impact of these images on mass audiences.

Another potential weakness of Studies 2 and 3 concerns the use of self-report measures of intergroup affect. While all the scales used to measure intergroup anxiety, empathy, and trust are frequently used in intergroup contact research, explicit indicators of psychological states have drawn criticism in recent years (e.g., Blascovich, Vanman, Mendes, & Dickerson, 2011). First, changes in mental states such as affect often happen subconsciously. Therefore individuals are oftentimes unaware of these shifts in mood or mental processing, making them unable to consciously and accurately report emotions

retroactively through self-reports. Some experts have identified physiological responses as superior to these explicit measures for being more sensitive, uncensored, prognostic, and mechanistic (Blascovich et al., 2011).

With this in mind, future studies concerning the affective outcomes of mediated contact should strive to incorporate physiological indicators of emotion. For example, facial electromyography (EMG) has effectively been used to document negative affect and racial biases, with physiological indicators directly contradicting self-reports that were influenced by social desirability biases (Vanman, Paul, Ito, & Miller, 1997). Although physiological measures can effectively differentiate positive versus negative affective responses, their accuracy in terms of identifying *specific* emotional states has been contested. Additionally, the extent to which they can measure *group-level* emotional states (e.g., the affective mediators of intergroup contact) needs further examination. Thus, a combination of physiological measures with intergroup emotion scales may be best practice in this domain.

Conclusion

In sum, a SCM approach to understanding mediated intergroup contact may not be an appropriate choice for measuring the quality of *all* social groups in the media. As the result of these studies demonstrated, warmth and competence operated differently depending on the social group in question in terms of their ability to predict the optimal conditions and affective mediators of intergroup contact. Still, when taken together, these findings underscore the importance of presenting members of marginalized groups in ways that diminish perceived social distance from the ingroup. Though the effectiveness of the contact interventions varied by group, there were largely only positive outcomes associated with exposure to highly warm and competent sexual minority characters, including increased

feelings of similarity, lessened anxiety, and increased trust. Most notably, exposure to a HW-HC transgender woman resulted in significant improvements in prejudicial beliefs. To this end, measures of stereotype content are effective in establishing a sexual minority character's quality with regard to *some* key factors that are indicative of his or her potential to facilitate positive mediated intergroup contact. Integrating SCM variables with group-specific stereotype scales and other metrics related to outgroup threat could provide researchers with a more holistic understanding of how to maximize prosocial outcomes of media exposure to social minorities. Hopefully the preliminary findings of this research will encourage other scholars interested in stereotypes and intergroup contact both on and off the screen to consider the merits of incorporating measures of warmth and competence into future work.

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